

The Story behind the Battle: How did the Red Army of the Soviet Union so fiercely and victoriously defend Stalingrad in 1942-43 despite the lack of trained officers, equipment, preparation, and morale in 1941?

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I declare that this thesis is a true account of my own work,
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Abstract

The victory over Axis forces by the Red Army during the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942-1943 is considered one of the major turning points of World War Two. General Vasily Chuikov and the men of the 62nd Army, supported by General Alexander Rodimtsev's 13th Guards Division, were trapped inside the city, where fighting amongst the bombed-out ruins at times consisted of hand-to-hand combat with only knives and spades as weapons. The German forces attacked Stalingrad with double the infantry the defenders possessed, three times their strength in artillery, five times as many tanks, and were supported by overwhelming air power, but the brilliant military tactics of General Georgy Zhukov enabled the Soviet armies outside Stalingrad to eventually encircle the yet undefeated German 6th Army.

Constrained by Soviet politics from its inception in 1918, and later by the paranoid psychology of the tyrannical leader Joseph Stalin, the men and women of the Red Army struggled to survive an inadequate system, with low pay and poor housing, and they often went untrained. Due to Stalin's ruthlessness in his desire to stay in power as Secretary of the Soviet Union and Soviet Premier, everyone, including ordinary citizens, peasants, and important politicians became victims of his wrath, and the military was certainly no exception. During the 1930s, the Red Army High Command was purged in its thousands, with the result being the loss of many highly experienced officers.

This thesis will discuss and analyses the Red Army's background from 1918, to its position in 1941, when German and Axis forces invaded the Soviet Union in a covert manoeuvre codenamed Operation Barbarossa. It will explain the occurrences that changed the Red Army from an untrained, undisciplined, purged, ill-equipped, and dispirited entity, to gain the victory at the battle of Stalingrad.

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Introduction

The first commandment of every victorious revolution as Marx and Engels repeatedly emphasised, was to smash the old army, dissolve it and replace it by a new one. A new social class when rising to power never could, and cannot now, attain power and consolidate it except by completely disintegrating the old army. (“Disorganisation!” the reactionary or just cowardly philistines have on this score), except by passing through a most difficult and painful period without any army, (the great French Revolution also passed through such a painful period), and by gradually building up, in the midst of hard civil war a new army, a new discipline, a new military organization of the new class.

Vladimir Lenin¹

The Red Army of the new Soviet Union was to be an army of a different sort, that is, different to the former Imperialist Army of Tsar Nicolas II, where the privileged ruled and the oppressed served. Bolshevik revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin wanted to end three hundred years of Imperial Russian military heritage by forming a totally ‘new army’ that would carry Marxist revolutionary ideals and would serve and protect the people from foreign and class enemies. His initial utopian vision of brotherhood and internal democracy within the Red Army proved unrealistic in the heat of battle because in itself the system created a lack of discipline and organisation in the ranks. By 1941 the institution had fallen away from much of its original Bolshevik ethics, and by the time of the German invasion of the Soviet

¹ Vladimir I. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960) Pp.92-93

Union, during Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, the Red Army had become an establishment similar to the Imperial Army that Lenin had so earnestly tried to distance it from. The officers once again lost touch with the common soldiers and the army became a harsh institution dominated by sergeants and senior officers who abused their inferiors. It had developed into an organisation based on lies and deceit, largely due to the totalitarian dictatorship of Joseph Stalin who was the Secretary of the Communist Party from 1922, and Premier of the Soviet Union from 6 May 1941 until his death on 5 March 1953.

The Russian town of Tsaritsyn was renamed Stalingrad after Stalin in 1925 and was known as such until 1961 when it was again renamed Volgograd. One of the first things that come to mind when we think of this town is the famous battle that occurred between the Soviet Union's Red Army and the Axis forces during World War Two. This battle was one of the bloodiest ever fought and arguably the most important of the war. During the battle the Red Army soldiers became urban guerrilla fighters, holding onto the Soviet leader's namesake and slowly regaining one battered building at a time despite the intense German onslaught raging around them on every side. Civilian men, women and children stood by the Red Army helping in whatever way they could, despite being caught up in the near total destruction of the town by the invading forces. They continued to work in the factories while the city of Stalingrad was reduced to rubble, repairing ferries and gunboats, producing guns, ammunition, and tanks, which they sometimes drove straight from the factory to the battlefield themselves. More civilians died in the Battle of Stalingrad than those killed in the bombings of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with only 1,500 surviving

from the original half a million population.² The Red Army lost 750,000 troops but despite the carnage, the Battle of Stalingrad was a mighty victory for the Soviets, who eventually sent the Germans into retreat, initiating a beginning to the end of World War Two in Europe. The victory of the Red Army at the Battle of Stalingrad is considered to be a major turning point in the defeat of Nazi Germany during World War Two.

Although the Red Army totally and victoriously defeated the German onslaught by 31 January 1943, it had not always been in the position to achieve such triumph and glory. Indeed, only months before Field-Marshal Friedrich Paulus, Commander of the infamous German 6th Army surrendered, elements of the Red Army had almost been annihilated. In fact, the soldiers of the Red Army had been in a very precarious position for quite some time before the Battle of Stalingrad and at various times during the invasion by the German forces.

This thesis is an analysis of the changes that occurred within the Red Army that turned it from an unstable, undisciplined, poorly trained, and ill-equipped force that was low on morale and spirit at the beginning of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, to the victorious and resilient contingent that thoroughly and irrevocably defeated the Axis powers. The Red Army had been weakened and dispirited by the military purges of the late 1930s, early 1940s, losing thousands of good experienced officers, and also some of their brilliant military tactics, such as Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky's theory of 'deep battle.' The Red Army was totally humiliated

² "*Battle of Stalingrad*." Narr. David Glantz. History Channel. Foxtel. 16 June. 2012. Television Programme.

during the Winter War with Finland due to a lack of organisation, proper equipment, and skilled leadership, and it was unprepared for total war at the beginning of the covert German invasion in 1941, which was the largest force ever assembled in a war. Deflated, and ill-equipped the men and women of the Red Army were almost annihilated during the first year, being captured and killed in their hundreds of thousands. Hitler thought that it would only be matter of months before the whole of the Soviet Union and her territories were under German subjugation, due to the inferiority of its fighting force. The focus of this thesis is how the Red Army rose up and was able to defeat such an overbearing, and superior enemy during the battle of Stalingrad, and the circumstances which enabled such a dramatic shift in power will also be discussed.

Chapter 1

An Army of a New Kind

After the February Russian Revolution of 1917 by the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the abdication of Tsar Nikolas II on 13 March the Russian Provisional Government was formed. It was led by Prince George Lvov with Alexander Kerensky as Minister of Justice, who also became Minister for War in May of the same year. Lvov, being unpopular with the people due to his unwillingness to withdraw Russia from World War One, resigned, leaving Kerensky in the leadership position. Kerensky was also an advocate for continuing the war against the Central Powers,³ and his government refused to give land to the poor peasants in the rural areas making him just as unpopular. Due to disorganisation and fighting within the army, thousands of soldiers deserted often taking their weapons with them. Kerensky and his government under threat from their own army in September of 1917 had to call upon the Bolsheviks and their Red Guards to protect them in Petrograd, handing over 40,000 rifles to them. Lacking the people's support, Kerensky's new government was eventually overthrown on 7 October 1917 by the much larger forces of Lenin's Red Guards, who also had the support of the Petrograd Soviet Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.⁴

The Soviets' first military force was completely voluntary and was drawn from the working class who were staunch in their defence of the revolution. By July 1917, before the October Revolution, Lenin had 10,000 Red Guards (paramilitary

³ The Central Powers consisted of Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Kingdom of Bulgaria. "Central Powers," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Volume 3*, 1994. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.)P.30

⁴ Martin Miller, Ed. *The Russian Revolution: The Essential Readings* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) P.34

volunteers recommended by the Bolsheviks) armed with rifles in the Petrograd factories.⁵ The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies issued Order Number One in March 1917. The seven-article order encouraged front-line soldiers to elect committees to represent themselves against the authority of the officers and not to surrender their arms.⁶ Soldiers refused to obey orders unless approved by their committees causing the army to take on democratic ideals.⁷ The officers hold on their men became weak and discipline deteriorated, with a high incidence of desertion. This unintentionally helped the Bolsheviks' agitation, despite the current Tsarist army not being answerable to them at the time.

After their victory, the Soviets established the All- Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage, Checka⁸ (chrezvychaynaya komissiya); on 20 December to harass any opponents to Soviet rule. This organisation was the early forerunner to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs or NKVD (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del) from which the KGB (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti) eventually emerged. The Tsars' army, which had been made up of mainly anti-communists, exhausted by the ravages of World War One, had collapsed, making it easier for the Soviets to totally abolish it in favour of a new military loyal to Marxist ideals. This new army was called the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army or RKKA (Raboche- krest'yanskaya krasnaya armiya), and was formed on 28 January 1918 by the Council of People's Commissars

⁵ Petrograd had been called Saint Petersburg until 1914, and was the Imperial Capital of Russia. In 1918 the Central government bodies moved to Moscow. After Lenin's death in 1924 Petrograd was changed to Leningrad. In 1991, after the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union, it reverted back to Saint Petersburg. "Saint Petersburg," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 10, 1994. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.) P. 332

⁶ "Order No. I of the Petrograd Soviet, March 14, 1917." Lillian Goldman Law Library. Yale Law School. *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*. 2008, 23 Sept. 2012 See Appendix Number One.

⁷ <http://www.avalon.law.yale.edu/20thcentury/soviet001.asp>

⁸ Roger R. Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* (London: Routledge, 2000) P. 2

⁸ Ibid, P. 35

(Sovnarkom), of which Leon Trotsky was the Chairman. He had also been voted in as Commissar of Foreign Affairs on 26 October 1917. The civilian leadership of the Red Army however soon realised that the enormous responsibility that it carried to protect the new Soviet government from any counter-revolutionary war or foreign intervention was beyond its scope.

Lenin desired an end to the Soviet Union's inclusion in the war, and on 3 March 1918 he was able to persuade the Communist party to sign the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers. The treaty cost the Soviet Union the Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic provinces and some of the Caucasus to the Central Powers, while Estonia, Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania gained their independence. Outraged, ex-Bolshevik forces took up arms against the Soviet government and a Civil War ensued, which lasted from 25 October 1917 to October 1922.⁹ In response to this conflict Lenin gave Trotsky, as the new leader of the People's Commissariat for Military and Naval Affairs (Narkomvoenmor), the task of creating an authentic, regular army.

Lenin wanted the new army to have a hierarchy of officers, to be controlled centrally by the government, and to be run without the previous military revolutionary socialist ideology, which he found to be the cause of lack of discipline amongst the troops, making them a weak fighting force. Lenin also created the Supreme Military Council headed by ex-tsarist General Bonch-Bruевич and staffed by mainly former officers. In fact, due to the shortage of experienced military

⁹ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* Pp. 1-6

leaders, thousands of former Imperial Army officers were recruited,¹⁰ and up to 50,000 had joined by 1921.¹¹ They were classed as ‘military specialists’ or ‘voenspety’,¹² a move that proved very controversial in the Party, causing much bickering, but a move that Trotsky considered necessary saying, “I have had occasion several times already to say at public meetings that in the sphere of command, of operations, of military actions, we place full responsibility upon military specialists and consequently give them the necessary powers.”¹³

The confusing assortment of civil-political structures of bureaucracy that oversaw the armed forces made Trotsky’s job of constructing the new army extremely complex, but by May 1918, he had created the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army, which he assigned to Mikhail A. Muravev, a former Tsarist lieutenant colonel. Dual control was established and Political advisors, called Commissars, were attached to all army units in order to watch over the reliability of officers and to carry out political propaganda. The democratic practices that had been encouraged to flourish in the Red Army during the February to October 1917 revolutionary period had to be curbed. From the very start of Trotsky’s army it was evident that this would be the Party’s child, with the Party in charge of training, supply, organisation, recruitment, and promotion. Trotsky said in a report to the Moscow City Conference on 28 March 1918, “But we cannot create an Army through an administrative mechanism alone- which is in our case at present as bad as it could possibly be. If we

¹⁰ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York :Metropolitan Books, 2006) P. 32

¹¹ “Red Army.” *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. 9. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1994) P. 981

¹² Dr. Jacob W. Kipp, “*The Russian Military and the Revolution in Military Affairs: A Case of the Oracle of Delphi or Cassandra?*” Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth KS. 8 June. 1995. 2 Sept. 2012.
<http://www.fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/rusma.htm>

¹³ Geoffrey Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006) P.85

do possess a powerful mechanism, this is an ideological one, namely, our Party. The Party will create the Army, comrades...”¹⁴

During February 1918 volunteer enlistment had been low, with only 20,000 joining the army. In response Trotsky started the practice of compulsory military training and conscription and by May the Red Army had 300,000 men. At its dispersal toward the end of the Civil War it was five million strong.¹⁵ Only workers and peasants were allowed to join the Red Army at first, with rich peasants (kulaks), the bourgeoisie, the clergy, and most nobility banned.¹⁶ Desertion was rife; mainly due to lack of interest in the Bolshevik Party, domestic problems of finance and war weariness. Trotsky realised that the army needed iron discipline, and that the officers seemed to lack authority and responsibility. Causing even more problems for Trotsky was the practice of deserters often taking their military equipment with them.

He set about instilling hard-line disciplinary actions against deserters, including execution of perpetrators. His Order Number 65 of November 1918, a seven-point document to the troops and Soviet institutions on the Southern Front, declared the ruthless means by which he was prepared to stop such activities. There was some respite however, and periodic amnesty weeks enabled thousands of soldiers to be taken back into the fold, with no questions asked.¹⁷ The previous egalitarian methods of hierarchy were halted as he abolished the election of officers and ordered soldiers

¹⁴ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.11

¹⁵ Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotsky, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*. Trans. Arnold J. Pomerans. (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1973) P.85

¹⁶ Ibid. P.84

¹⁷ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.13 “Order Number 65.” See Appendix Number Two

to disband committees; but despite his orders some units still elected officers well into 1920.

Feeding, training, equipping, arming, housing and paying the soldiers, as well as the problems of discipline in the Red Army were challenges that never really went away. Between 1919 and 1920, because of the war torn economy and the bad supply situation caused by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the army could not handle the vicious cycle of conscripting too large a force, the lack of training, desertions, and stealing of equipment. Morale was extremely low; this was because the soldiers sometimes starved, went without uniforms and even boots, caught typhus, smallpox, cholera, influenza and venereal diseases. Looting and violence were by-products. Soldiers deserted to find food for themselves and often also for their hungry families and in a few cases units, mainly made up of peasants, refused to move to the front lines.

The Military Specialists were also problematic, many served under protest. Those who thought of desertion were often dissuaded by the threat of violence to their families, whose whereabouts was kept on file by the Commissariat of Defence. They were reviled by the common soldier, and even Lenin himself did not totally trust them. After nominating ex- Imperial army colonel Ioakim Vatsetus as Commander-in-Chief on July 1918, he told Trotsky not to hesitate in shooting him if he failed “to obtain rapid and decisive success.”¹⁸ The new officers who were turned out by the officer training schools at this time were more acceptable to the common soldiers and

¹⁸ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* Pp.15, 16, 22

better trusted by the Commissariat of War as politically reliable, however their military attitude was questionable.

Georgi Zhukov and Semyon Budenny, joined the ranks of the Red Army on 2 August 1918 after a call up of former Imperial Army Non-Commissioned-Officers, and were immediately promoted by Trotsky to the distinguished rank of platoon commander. Both eventually became Marshals of the Soviet Union and each would play their own distinctive part in the forthcoming purges of the Red Army and also during World War Two.¹⁹ Despite lacking any major military credentials, many Bolshevik revolutionaries gained positions of great power within the Red Army, a fact that no doubt later accounted for many military disasters for the Soviet Union. At this time Joseph Stalin as a former active Bolshevik revolutionary was among those fortunate enough to fulfil military-political status and rose quickly in the Soviet Government; an occurrence that many Red Army officers would live to lament during the military purges of the late 1930s, early 1940s.

The Russian Civil War was not as easily distinguished as being a war between Reds and Whites and the half-hearted assistance of the Interventionists,²⁰ but was a much more complex and intricate matter. Not only did the Bolsheviks have to also contend with such Leftist enemy factions as the Socialist Revolutionaries, the rural Greens (mainly partisan bands) and urban anarchists, but there was continual

¹⁹ The rank of a Soviet Marshal was equivalent to that of a five-star General in the army of the United States of America. The rank was established on 22 September 1935 by the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), and abolished in 1991. Christopher Bellamy, "*The Oxford Companion to Military History*." Oxford University Press. 2004. 25 Sept. 2012 <http://www.answers.com/topic/marshal-field-marshal>

²⁰ The Interventionist Forces consisted of fourteen different nations "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: The Civil War and the Creation of the U.S.S.R." *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, Volume 28* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1994) P.999-1000. See Appendix Number Three for the complete list.

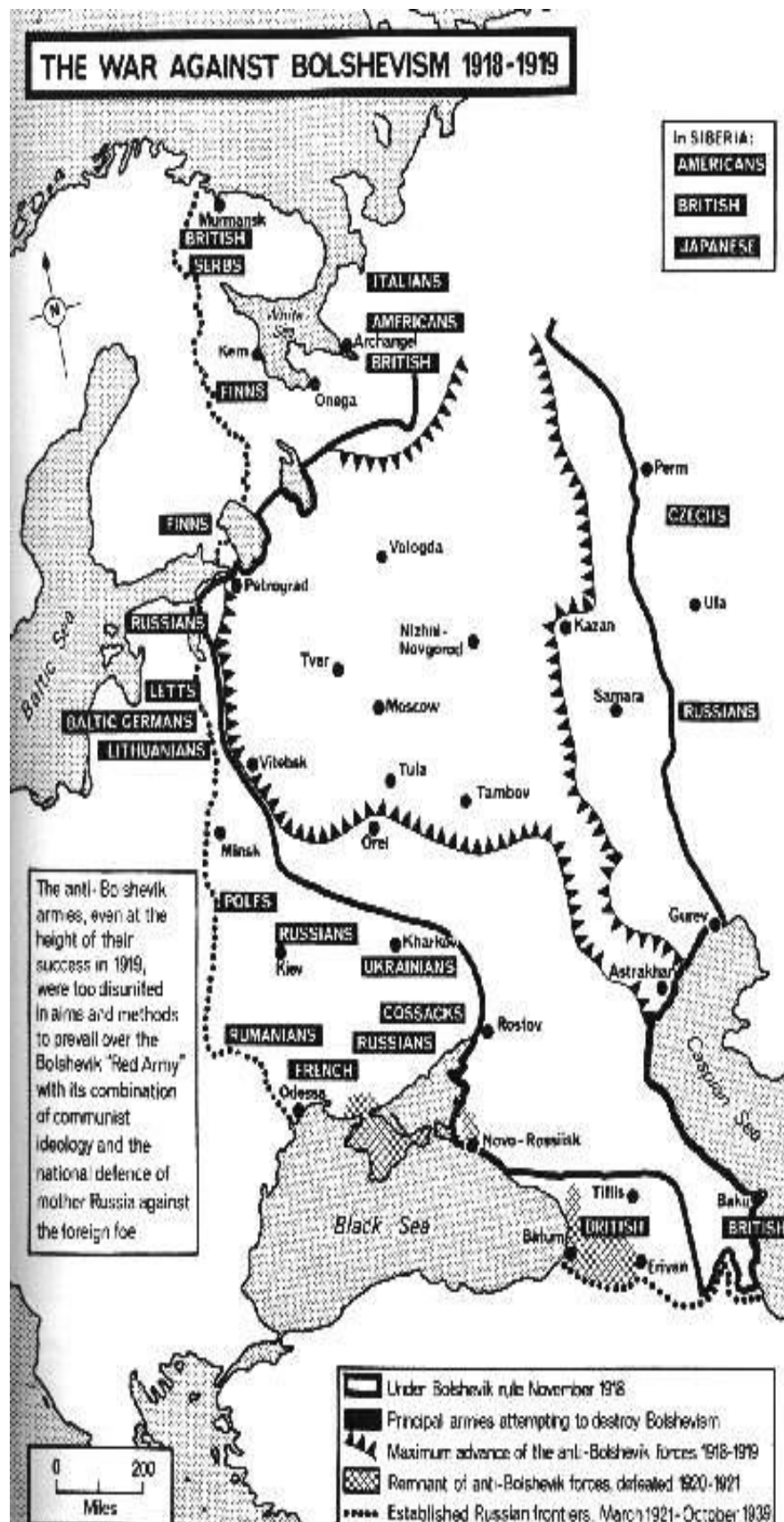
fighting, betrayals and desertions within their own army. Trying to centralise control of the army for the purposes of discipline was a constant problem, a goal that Trotsky and Lenin never totally fulfilled. Their main opposition came from stubborn high-ranking party members and conflicting socialist standards among Bolsheviks. Control over the army by the Party during the Civil War was less than solid. Defiance of local units to come under the umbrella of the central powers hindered cohesive large-scale operations. Trotsky named commanders of such units as 'partizanshchina,' not to be confused with the actual partisan forces that at times fought with the Red Army against the Whites.²¹

Nearly two-thirds of the soldiers who fought at the front lines up until late 1919 during the Civil War had little or no training before battle, with many deserting on the way. Poor housing was an issue that continued for many years and caused low morale. Bad pay and meagre supplies of food, clothing, and equipment dispirited the soldiers of the Red Army on a constant basis which led to discipline problem. Raggedy, dirty troops were just a by-product of lack of uniforms and toiletries, but eventually they were better trained with organised units that were available to fight. Trotsky relied on a small quantity of highly trained personnel which he shifted from battle to battle and crisis to crisis. While his use of ex-tsarist officers was inevitable and had the backing of Lenin it was still an extreme sore point in the Party, particularly by the 'left communists' who feared a return to the practices of the pre-revolutionary Imperial Army. But Trotsky would not back down in his resolve to use ex-tsarists and without them never would have gained the level of achievement and

²¹ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.18

organisation within the Red Army that he did. Despite the fact that expertise was forced by bullying tactics from disinterested specialists and that the Soviet army was ideologically not suitable to hierarchy, they somehow survived despite the loss of 50,000 men in the Civil War.

During the Interwar years (1922-1939), the Red Army became mainly a reservist army. A large territorial force (terrarmeitsy) consisted of up to 75 percent of the entire army of one million men. Another half a million troops were maintained in a



regular standing army (krasnoarmeitys), which was a much smaller force in contrast to the five million-strong army that had existed at the end of the Civil War. An old Bolshevik, and now Central Committee member, Mikhail Frunze, formulated the idea of “unified military doctrine.” This was a new set of ideals and principles that would govern the army as it prepared for any future war, and stipulated that the Communist Party would continue to have the leading role in military affairs as an army of a ‘new type.’ The people and the army would be one and the army should represent and defend an international proletariat.’²² Regular career leaders, not elected, would lead the army under central control, and dual command, which had been authorized at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, was to be done away with in favour of a one-man command (edinonachalie).

Frunze wanted iron discipline to be instilled along with a high political consciousness and for the army to be in a state of constant readiness. Trotsky opposed Frunze’s doctrine as dangerous to free thinking, and believed that more attention should be given to the training of the peasants. In 1923 Lev Kamenev, Grigor Zinoviev and Stalin had formed an unofficial triumvirate in the Politburo dedicated to preventing Leon Trotsky from assuming the dying Lenin’s leadership and had helped dismiss Trotsky from his powerful position as War Commissar in 1924.²³ He was not in favour with Stalin, and so Frunze’s doctrine was adopted and Trotsky’s fears of lack of training of soldiers by the high command would eventually

²² Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.53

²³ Chris Ward, *Stalin’s Russia* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993) P.14

be proven. Frunze replaced Trotsky as the People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs in 1924, but died unexpectedly in 1925.²⁴

Military Districts were established, conscription reintroduced, rearmament and standardisation and organisation of regiments and divisions was started. There was an effort to modernise the army despite the poor economy and the fact that the army only received approximately 2 percent of the National Budget. Stalin, who had been Secretary of the Communist Party (Gensec) since 1924, refused to give them any more money and favoured investment in civilian industry. There was also ongoing suspicion of the new recruits. Conscripts backgrounds were checked to weed out rich peasants (kulaks), former noblemen and bourgeoisie and the new soldiers were deloused, and tested for contagious diseases. The fact that most of the population was illiterate caused problems of technical training and the army favoured 'literate workers.' However, in an effort to bolster support for the Bolsheviks in the countryside, thousands of peasants were also enlisted. Training for new recruits remained basic. One conscript wrote "Our military training began with a steam bath, the disinfection of our clothes, a haircut that left our heads as smooth as our faces, and a political lecture." A good meal and a uniform were to conclude the physical transformation from civilian to soldier. In an effort to increase the size of the Red Army, in 1936 the draft age was lowered from 21 to 19, and under the 'Stalin Constitution' all class and nationality restriction were done away with, allowing for kulaks and their children to join the Red Army at last. In 1939 Stalin also abolished draft exemption for conscientious objectors and religious believers.²⁵

²⁴ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.55-56

²⁵ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.57

While there was supposed to be a period of preconscription training, which comprised of 200 hours over a two year period, due to the short period of only two years conscription and lack of material, and human resources to supervise and conduct such training made this practice unorganised and chaotic. Basic military skills were supposed to be learnt during winter indoor training shortly after drafting, but were often neglected by indifferent officers. By the time conscripts entered the more advanced outdoor summer training camps many were still ignorant of the fundamentals. There were also many distractions that dragged the new conscripts away from vital training, such as political instruction, and agricultural and industrial work. Dneproges, the Kharkov tractor works, the Magnitogorsk metallurgy complex, the Gomel' agricultural machinery company, and other industrial plants were built by both the Red Army's regular and territorial units. From late 1920 to the mid 1930s the Red Army was more a labour army than a fighting force, and the army became less capable with each passing year.²⁶

Reservist forces were larger than regular units, but received less funding. Members kept their regular jobs, and were supposed to receive eight months of military training over a five year period, after which they went onto a list for 'wartime' recall. Their training programmes were full-scale but their units lacked funds and equipment, and it was hard to organise unit cohesion because of the distances between members. Consequently, many mistakes and missed meetings were inevitable and went unchecked. There was a shortage of uniforms, supplies, and the reservists were also caught up in the usual labour force distractions. Stalin started

²⁶, Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.57-58

to reduce the reservist force in 1931 due to the threat of war on the horizon and by 1939 all of these units were absorbed into the regular army.²⁷

During the Interwar years the Soviet General Staff created more partially-manned divisions instead of fully manning those already in existence, exacerbating the problem of the shortage of officers. The outcome of this was that it became common for battalions to be commanded by a senior lieutenant, rather than a major. New soldiers could join a unit overnight, making it impossible for commanders to know their men's training levels, and disorganisation ensued. Apart from the confusion that too many new divisions and the dissolving of hundreds of somewhat organised reservist forces caused, daily life in the regular Red Army was less than idyllic. Housing was so bad in 1927 that the situation caused General Kliment Voroshilov to comment that it was "worse than under the Tsar."²⁸

The soldier's barracks were of a bad quality and a poor budget prevented any maintenance, while conscription rates exceeded the building rate. Soldiers had to construct their homes themselves. Zhukov wrote, that in 1932 the entire cavalry corps in which he served relocated, and the troops had to spend eighteen months building their own quarters from the ground up, "degenerating, as a result, into an inefficient labour force. This disastrously affected morale and combat worthiness. Discipline grew lax..."²⁹ Training was suspended while troops spent their entire time constructing buildings, while in the meantime they often froze in tents during winter months. There were no bath houses, and the high standards of hygiene that Frunze's

²⁷ Ibid, P.60

²⁸ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.65

²⁹ Ibid, P.65

reforms had tried to instil went by the wayside. When famine struck the Soviet Union in 1933, rations were cut by 30 percent, except in the honoured Moscow Military District, but at least they were better than the meagre scratching that the civilians were reduced to.

In some areas the malnourished draftees of 1933 were immediately put on extra rations, whereas in other districts officers were indifferent to the suffering of their men. However, such callousness did not go unrewarded, and troops could protest until investigations put the perpetrators under arrest. Unit farms were encouraged, but even then, greedy and unscrupulous supply officers tried to use the profits for their own gain. These farms became part of the institution until they were done away with in 1991. Soldiers often knew more about farming than warfare, and the assistant commander of 87th Rifle Regiment knew all the thirty-eighty cows owned by the regiment by name.³⁰

Supply in the Red Army was unorganised, and when standard uniforms did eventually arrive in full there was still a shortage of warm winter woollens. Pay was low, with as little as one ruble, forty kopeks a month.³¹ In 1933 a Bureau of Red Army Men's Letters was established to address their grievances. Due to the physical underdevelopment of the national infrastructure most of the Bureau's secretaries did not even knowing the correct statutes and codes that governed actioning these requests, so most letters went unanswered or were sent on to other agencies.

³⁰ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.67

³¹ Today's current exchange rates: 10 Russian Rubles (RUB) are worth 32c American (U.S.D). Stephen Ostermiller, "Russian Ruble (RUB) and United States Dollar (USD) Currency Exchange Rate Conversion Calculator: 28 September 2012." 2003-2012, 28 Sept. 2012 IGMARKET.COM.AU. http://www.coinmill.com/RUB_USDhtml

Consequently, this factor along with the bad housing situation, low pay, food shortages, inadequate training, and lack of attention to the soldier's welfare by apathetic officers caused discipline within the Red Army to become even worse.

Red Star (Krasnaia zvezda), the official Red Army newspaper issued a report on August 1932 that stated, Sometimes the cause [of indiscipline] (sic) lies in the poor organisation of the daily routine. Tents are dirty, boots are uncleaned owing to the lack of brushes and blacking, cloths are torn owing to the lack of needles, thread and repairing material. There is an inadequate quantity of crockery in the mess halls and the supervision over the preparation of food is insufficient.³²

The most common crimes that soldiers were court-martialled for were theft of money and selling supplies to civilians. On the eve of the purges, between 1 January and 31 May 1937, the army recorded 400,000 disciplinary infringements.³³ This is clear evidence that the soldiers of the Red Army were not receiving adequate pay, food, or discipline at this stage in the army's development.

³² Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.68

³³ Ibid, P.69

Chapter 2

The Red Army Purged

During the late 1920s, Joseph Stalin, having turned his position of Secretary of the Communist Party, which he gained in 1922, into one of ultimate power, unleashed a great purge upon the peasants, both rich and poor, and then upon members of the Politburo (Political Bureau), whom he thought may be a threat to his reign.

Thousands of Kulaks were opposed to Stalin abolishing the New Economic Policy (N. E. P.),³⁴ that Lenin had created in 1921, in favour of a new system, the collective farm movement or kolkhoz.³⁵ They were executed, deported or kicked off of their own farms. The N.E.P. had allowed the peasants to keep and sell their surplus grain, which encouraged them to grow more. Eventually, the agricultural industry became larger and more successful than that of the industrial, causing factory goods to become expensive. Peasants, having to pay higher prices for these goods, started to hoard their surplus grain, waiting for higher prices. Unable to procure enough grain for the industrialised areas, the Soviet party had to install a policy of rationing. Consequently, Stalin embarked on a system that required voluntary pooling of land, agricultural implements, and buildings from the peasant farmers. This system was eventually enforced, due to strong opposition from the peasants. 25,000,000 poor peasants (bedneyaki and serednyaki), were taken from their farms and villages and

³⁴ N.E.P. (New Economic Policy). 1921-c. 1927/28 Ward, *Stalin's Russia* P. xvii

³⁵ Ward, *Stalin's Russia*. Pp. xx-xxi 'Kolkhoz', (A collective farm in which the produce was divided between kolkhozniki 'peasants in a kolkhoz,' after obligatory deliveries had been made to the state and the MTS, 'Machine Tractor Station,' a depot which hired out machines to the kolkhozy and sovkhozy, 'workers in a farm run by the state in which the workforce received a wage.')

forced to work on these kolkhoz, being rounded up by ‘collectivisation brigades.’

Stalin’s second wife Nadya, after criticising his Collectivisation policy committed suicide; such was the universal fear of the tyrant.³⁶

After the 1934 murder of Sergei Mironovich Kirov, who was head of the Leningrad party organisation, and one of Stalin’s best friends and most trusted aides, Stalin launch a purge of the Politburo. Using Kirov’s murder as an excuse to accuse and arrest his enemies and those who had insulted him in the past, he was able to destroy them, and settle some old scores. Old grudges featured in the background of many of Stalin’s arrests and executions. The fact that Kirov had been more popular than Stalin in a voting session of the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1934 for the Central Committee, was closer to the truth of why Kirov had suddenly been murdered, despite being one of Stalin’s closest friends. Friendship and loyalty meant nothing to him in his desire to stay in his position of absolute power. Once again, using the murder of Kirov as an excuse, Stalin turned his wrath on the Red Army and some of its powerful leaders, who had the capability and strength to bring him down. Thousands of officers were accused of being spies or ‘enemies of the state,’ and were arrested, given long prison sentences, or executed. Denunciations of other so-called spies by tortured victims kept the Gulags full, and the NKVD executioners busy.

On June 1937, a shock announcement was made that several high ranking officers of the Red Army, including Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the Deputy People’s

³⁶ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003) P.112

Commissar of Defence and one of the first five Marshals of the Soviet Union, had been executed for treason, for plotting a military coup.³⁷ He was one of the greatest military thinkers in the Soviet Union at the time, and he and other military strategists had developed a theory of 'Deep Battle' tactics; which was tailored to the economical, cultural, and geopolitical position of the Soviet Union. They had endeavoured to create a military strategy with its own specialised operational art and tactics. The Soviet Union was the first country to officially distinguish the third level of military thinking which occupied the position between strategy and tactics. By 1936 it had become part of the Red Army Field Regulations. 'Deep Battle' envisaged the breaking of the enemy's forward defences, or tactical zones, for fresh uncommitted mobile operational reserves to exploit, by breaking into the strategic depth of an enemy front. The goal of a deep operation was to inflict a decisive strategic defeat on the enemy and render the defence of their front more difficult, impossible - or, indeed, irrelevant. Unlike most other doctrines, deep battle stressed combined arms cooperation at *all* levels: strategic, operational, and tactical.

Not only were the military strategists liquidated, but their ideas were also dispensed with. Soviet sources admitted in 1988,

In 1937-1938...all commanders of the armed forces, members of the military councils, and chiefs of the political departments of the military districts, the majority

³⁷ Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) P. 182

of the chiefs of the central administrations of the People's Commissariat of Defence, all Corps commanders, almost all division and brigade commanders, about one-third of the regimental commissars, many teachers of higher, middle military and military-political schools were judged and destroyed.³⁸

The deep operation concept was thrown out of Soviet military strategy as it was associated with the denounced figures that created it. This in turn was a major cause of the disastrous military blunders during the Winter War with Finland in 1939, and also in the opening chapter of the German invasion of 1941. The Soviet deep battle, in the words of one historian, "was radically different to the nebulous 'blitzkrieg' method, although it produced similar if more strategically impressive results."³⁹

Prior to the military High Command executions, Stalin's henchmen, the NKVD, had been systematically arresting and interrogating (torturing), other officers from Military Districts all over the Soviet Union in order to gain denunciations, that in turn implied other officers, and so on. By the time Stalin's scathing purge of the military had done its damage three of the first five Marshals of the Soviet Union had been executed, (only Stalin's two old cronies, Klementi Voroshilov and Semion Budenny, whom he had instilled himself, had survived), along with 13 of the 15 Army Commanders; 8 of the 9 Fleet Admirals; 50 of the 57 Corps Commanders; all

³⁸ David Glantz, "Pomit' uroki istorii. Vsemerno ukrepiat' boevuiu gotovnost." – "Remember the Lessons of History." Strengthen Combat Readiness in every possible way, *VIZH*, No.6, 1998, P.6;

³⁹ Robert Watt, "Feeling the Full Force of a Four Point Offensive: Re-Interpreting the Red Army's 1944 Belorussian and L'vov-Przemysl Operations." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 2008. Pp.677-678

of the 16 Army Commissars; 25 of the 28 Corp Commissars, and 58 of the 64 Divisional Commissars.⁴⁰ The damage to the Red Army by these military purges was phenomenal, and has been regarded as the major cause of such high losses of personnel during their invasion of Finland in 1939, which became known as the Winter War and its appalling state of readiness just prior to the German invasion in 1941.

The military purges created a chronic shortage of officers to lead the troops, and it is estimated that there was a need for at least 220,000 more to command the new army before Hitler's forces attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, in a covert military assault entitled Operation Barbarossa.⁴¹ Red Army troops were left untrained, and the new commanders who replaced them were too young and inexperienced. The German General Staff, who were the elite trainers of the Wehrmacht, commented at the end of 1939 that, "although they found the principle of leadership good in the Soviet Army, the leadership itself is, however, too young and inexperienced."⁴² Many once capable and strong military leaders who survived the purges and were eventually released, due to having been imprisoned for some time, were left spiritually, physically, and mentally broken, being of no further use to the army. Stalin's hand-picked Marshals, Voroshilov and Budenny were said to have been catastrophic leaders, but were arbitrarily allowed to live.⁴³

⁴⁰ Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* P.450

⁴¹ Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia: 1934-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) P.200

⁴² Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* P.452

⁴³ Ibid, Pp.431, 452, 455

On 23 August 1939 the Soviet Union made a pact with Nazi Germany which became known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Non-aggression Pact. The pact had a secret clause dividing Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland into German and Soviet spheres of influence.⁴⁴ Stalin needed to buy time to prepare for the war with Germany that he knew was eventually coming, and thought that the Red Army would be armed and prepared by 1942. On 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland from the north, south and west, and sixteen days later the Soviet Union's General Staff had, on short notice, mobilised the Belorussian and the Kiev Special Military districts to invade from the east. The invasion, apart from some difficulties with co-ordination and cooperation between units due to the short notice, was a success and the Red Army had secured eastern Poland by the end of the month.

The Battle of Khalkin-Gol, from May to September 1939 in Mongolia against the Japanese, was not so easily won. With supply depots far from the battlefield it took three months and a massive effort by supply and transport personnel to overcome this problem. Morale was atrocious, with newly arrived reservist being more of a detriment than a benefit and sometimes whole battalions ran from the battlefield abandoning their weapons and equipment. The confusion and bad manoeuvring of forces was eventually overcome by General Georgi Zhukov's, clever use of armoured forces and a firm stance on discipline. He was one of the few to escape the military purges of the late 1930s. He had no qualms in using up as many troops as were needed to ensure victory and casualties at Khalkin-Gol were an astronomical 34 percent.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Montefiore, *The Court of the Red Tsar* P.310

⁴⁵ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* P.98

In the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland (November 1939-March 1940), the Red Army was totally humiliated, exhibiting a lack of organisation, strategic military tactics, and the need for more experienced officers than could be provided. Fighting in temperatures as low as minus 40 degrees C, thousands of untrained and ill-equipped soldiers were sent out by equally unskilled officers, terrified by the purges that were still occurring. Such was the lack of army materiel, that many Red Army soldiers were sent, usually to their deaths, to walk across snowy mine fields without the use of mine detectors. Due to the lack of the correct winter outfits many froze to death where they lay after being wounded. The Soviet troops were totally unprepared to outmanoeuvre the Finish soldiers, who took advantage of the fact that they knew their own landscape well, and were perfectly camouflaged in white uniforms. This, plus the fact that they had adopted a form of snow-guerrilla fighting earned them the Russian nick-name of 'belydsmerť' or 'white death' from the Red Army soldiers.⁴⁶ American journalist Virginia Cowles wrote when visiting the battlefield,

The roads and forests were strewn with the bodies of the men and horses; with wrecked tanks, field kitchens, trucks, gun carriages, maps, books, and articles of clothing. The corpses were frozen as hard as petrified wood ... Some of the bodies were piled on top of each other... covered only by a merciful blanket of snow; others were sprawled against the trees in grotesque attitudes.⁴⁷

Red Army casualties in this short war were approximately 126,875 dead and missing with 265,000 wounded. This resulted in a major re-evaluation within the Red

⁴⁶ Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2012) (Kindle Version)

⁴⁷ Ibid

Army, which included the replacement of Marshal Kliment Voroshilov by Marshal Semion Timoshenko as Commissar of Defence. Voroshilov's last report before leaving his post was scathing in its condemnation of the condition of the Red Army, and one line stated that, "The quality of officer training is poor, especially in the platoons and companies..."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-199* P.99

Chapter 3

Assault on the Soviet Union

At 3:15 am on 22 June 1941, Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union was launched. The length of the front was 1,800 kilometres, the longest ever in history.⁴⁹ Hitler was keen for new ‘living space’ (Lebensraum), and the vast regions of the Soviet Union had always been on his agenda. He wrote in *Mein Kampf* in 1924, “...However when we speak of new land in Europe today, we must principally bear in mind Russia and the border states subject to her. Destiny itself seems to wish to point the way for us here.” The Soviet Union was a particular focus for his anti-Semitic, anti- Communist, and anti- Slav prejudices. In a speech in Nuremburg in 1937 Hitler had referred to the leaders of the Soviet Union as, “an uncivilised Jewish- Bolshevik international guild of criminals.”⁵⁰ Germany, flushed with the success of its easy victories over the armies of Western Europe in 1939, believed that its forces would have what they thought were racially inferior beings in the Soviet Union, subdued in a matter of months. That almost became a reality as the problems that the Red Army had experienced during the interwar years of lack of training, equipment, discipline, morale, and multiple desertions only magnified after the invasion.

In a three-pronged attack by the Germans, Field Marshal Wilhelm von Leeb commanded Army Group North heading for the Baltic States and Leningrad, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock was with Army Group Centre advancing towards Minsk,

⁴⁹ Laurence Rees, *War of the Century: When Hitler fought Stalin* (New York: The New York Press, 1999) P.40

⁵⁰ Ibid, P.14,15

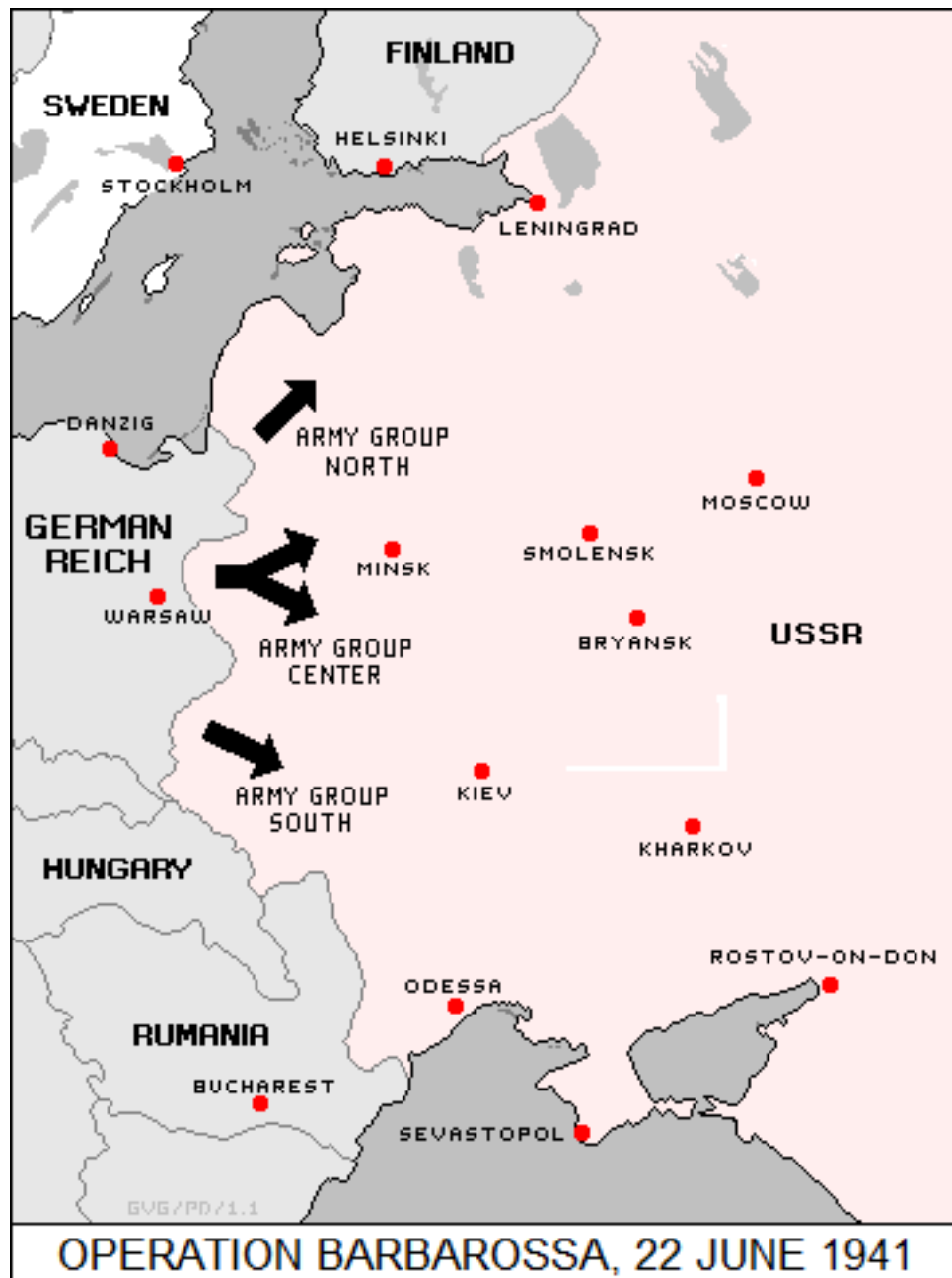
Smolensk and Moscow, while Field-Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt led Army Group South towards the Ukraine. The Wehrmacht's use of Blitzkrieg⁵¹ tactics enabled them to advanced almost one hundred kilometres inland on their first day. While they were highly organised and their spirits soared, due to the surprise and advantage of the German attack, on the Soviet side shock and chaos reigned.

Bridges were seized; Stukas flew off to find tank fields, headquarters and communication centres. Within a few hours 1,200 Soviet aircraft were destroyed, many never having attained flight. Most of the Soviet pilots had little or no knowledge of aerial combat, and their planes were old models or in need of repair. Despite this, the Soviet Union Information Bureau (propaganda machine), reported on 24 June that 76 enemy planes had been destroyed in the last twenty four hours.⁵² German Panzer divisions advanced as soon as they heard word that the infantry had taken bridges. At 5:45 a.m., from his headquarters in Wilkowsi, Poland, Hitler proclaimed to the German people and the army through the voice of Goebbels his propaganda minister, on the radio, the lie that Germany was threatened by "approximately 160 Russian divisions massed on our frontier."⁵³ He continued that, "For weeks violations of that frontier had been taking place...This has brought us to the hour when it is necessary for us to take steps against this plot devised by Jewish

⁵¹ Blitzkrieg meaning 'lightning war,' is a military tactic, designed to create psychological shock and resultant disorganisation in enemy forces through the employment of surprise, speed, and superiority in materiel and or firepower. The essence of blitzkrieg is the use of mobility, shock, and locally concentrated firepower in a skilfully coordinated attack to paralyse an adversary's capacity to coordinate his own defences rather than physically trying to overcome them, and then to exploit this paralysis by penetrating to his rear areas and disrupting his whole system of communications and administration. "Blitzkrieg" *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol 2*. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1994) P.285

⁵² Sir John Hammerton Ed. "Russia and Germany Locked in Deadly Combat" *The War Illustrated*. July 11th, 1941 Vol 4 No. 97 (London: The Amalgamated Press Ltd., 1941) P.681

⁵³ Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege*. 1942-1943. (New York: Viking, 1998) P.20



Map Two: The three- pronged German invasion of the Soviet Union

German armed forces achieved strategic surprise and made substantial progress towards their initial objectives. Army Group Center reached Smolensk by July. Large Soviet military forces were surrounded as a result. An operational pause ensued at the center of the front while armoured forces from Army Group Center struck south to link up with forces striking northward from Army Group South. This move destroyed a substantial concentration of Soviet armed forces around Kiev.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Maps of World War II > "Eastern Front 1941- 1942" <http://www.onwar.com/maps/wwii/eastfront1/index2.htm> 1 Oct. 2012

Anglo-Saxon war mongers, and the equally Jewish rulers of the Bolshevik centre in Moscow...”⁵⁵

The Soviet forces were slightly larger than that of the invaders, (approximately 3 million each), but due to the thousands of officers executed during the military purges of the 1930s, they were no match for the more experienced and skilled soldiers of the German armies. Post-purge promotions had placed many unsuitable men in High Command, but Commander Shaposhnikov, an ex-Tsarist colonel, now Chief of Staff, was still in favour and was able to promote quite a few efficient officers. Marshal Semion Timoshenko who had taken over from Marshal Voroshilov had tried to restore the Red Army after the disaster in Finland and was now Defence Commissar.

Stalin, in denial for the first couple of days after the invasion, initially thought that there must have been a military coup of Hitler's Generals. He had trusted Hitler and seems to have gone into a state of shock at the betrayal. "...he wasn't interested in anything, he'd lost all initiative and was in a bad way,"⁵⁶ reported Old Bolshevik Anastas Mikoyan, whose main assignment throughout the war was supplying the Red Army with materials, food, and other necessities, gaining him the nickname, 'the ice cream and frankfurt man.'⁵⁷ Communications had been disrupted and nobody knew what was going on. On the first day of the invasion the towns of Kiev, Sebastopol,

⁵⁵ Sir John Hammerton Ed. "Hitler Takes the Road to Moscow" July 4th, 1941. *The War Illustrated*. June 27th, 1941 Vol 4 No. 95 (London: The Amalgamated Press Ltd., 1941) P.663

⁵⁶ Ward, *Stalin's Russia* P.169

⁵⁷ Merridale, *Ivan's War* P.32

Odessa, Minsk and Riga had been bombed.⁵⁸ Georgy Semenyak, a young soldier in the Soviet 204th Division recalled, “I fought on the border for three days and three nights...the bombing, shooting...explosions of artillery gunfire continued non-stop...aeroplanes continuously dropped bombs.” On the fourth day his unit retreated into chaos and he watched in despair as the officers deserted. “The lieutenants, captains ... took rides on passing vehicles...mostly trucks travelling east.”⁵⁹ As a result of the purges, and the expansion of the Red Army most of these petrified young officers had only been in their positions for less than a year, and were clearly unable to cope.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was expected in a very short time by the German officials and almost all of the world powers. The U.S Secretary of the Navy wrote to President Roosevelt that, “the best opinion that I can get is that it will take anywhere from six weeks to two months for Hitler to clean up on Russia.” Meanwhile, the British Home Office told the BBC that they should not give out the impression that Russian armed resistance would last more than six weeks.⁶⁰

At a meeting in Moscow on 27 June attended by Stalin and members of the Politburo, Marshal Georgy Zhukov was questioned about the situation, but visibly shaken could tell them nothing. The military did not know where the Germans were, how far they’d advanced, or where their own armies were. Stalin stormed out of the

⁵⁸ Montefiore, *The Court of the Red Tsar* Pp.364-366

⁵⁹ Rees, *War of the Century: When Hitler fought Stalin* P.44

⁶⁰ Ibid, P.46

building saying, “Lenin founded our state and now we’ve fucked it up.” He hid in his dacha, depressed for the next few days, while the Germans advanced on Minsk. Eventually, senior members of the Politburo persuaded him to ‘lead the Soviet Union to victory’ and in a display of intimacy and kind words to the Soviet people, Stalin made a radio announcement on 3 July. “Comrades, citizens, brothers and sisters, men of our Army and Navy, he began, my words are addressed to you, dear friends.” He gave a brief overview of the ‘perfidious military attack’ by the Germans, revealed the fact that the Red Air Force lay in ruins, despite their heroic defence, and explained how Hitler’s troops had already invaded and captured Lithuania, most of Latvia, the western part of Belorussia, and part of Western Ukraine. He could hardly disguise his defensiveness as he spoke of the Soviet-German Pact which had bought them a year and a half of peace, and promised military success in the near future. “...this short-lived military gain for Germany is only an episode.”⁶¹ Stalin’s kind words to the people was said to have endeared them to him immensely, and despite his eradication of millions of his own people during the purges and the start of the Collectivisation programme, and the organised mass-population migrations after the war of the Kalmyks, Karahai, Chechens, Balkars, and Tartars, he was mourned sadly after his death in 1953 as the saviour of the Motherland.⁶²

Between June 1941 and February 1945, at least 5.7 million Red Army personnel were taken prisoner during the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Out of this number an astonishing 3.3 million died, usually of disease or starvation. Typhus was

⁶¹ Rees, *War of the Century* P.46, 52

⁶² Ibid, P.194-198

rife due to the soldiers being covered in lice. Most were given no food for days, and then thrown a few boxes of scraps by the Germans, who watched as they fought and scrambled for the contents. They had no shelter, being jailed in open wire camps with barely any water, and some eventually succumbed to cannibalism, eating livers, lungs, and buttocks. German soldiers also arbitrarily shot at them. Georgy Semenyak, a soldier captured near Minsk in July 1941 said, “They just never considered us human.”⁶³ Consequently morale in the Red Army was practically non-existent during the early months of the German assault on the Soviet Union.

A war of unparalleled brutality had been started, echoing the very nature of each opposing force’s leader. The Einsatzgruppen, Germany’s special ‘task force’ in charge of liquidating Jews and Soviet Commissars, set to work in the first couple of days of the invasion, even taking Jewish children out of orphanages to be shot. After Kharkov had been taken the Germans did not allow the citizens beyond the city limits, even to trade for food. Townsfolk ate all the dogs, and when they had gone they had to eat the bark and leaves from birch trees. The Germans had no sympathy for starving children, whom they labelled ‘*unnutzer Esser*,’ (useless eaters). Hitler ordered that during retreats “every place of inhabitation must be burnt down and destroyed...” These atrocities were also carried out by ordinary German soldiers, despite their claims after the war that it was only SS and Einsatzgruppen who committed these despicable acts.⁶⁴ Eye-witnesses, both Soviet and German testify to this lie. Walter Mauth, a German infantryman, when talking of the scorched earth

⁶³ Ibid, P.60

⁶⁴ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.15

policy said, “I never noticed anybody bothering to have a look inside the house to see whether there was a sick woman or anybody else in there.” Soviet units also adhered to the scorched earth policy, but their reason was to deprive the Germans of food and supplies. Either way civilians suffered from the military policies of both sides.⁶⁵

A German document dated 23 May 1941, entitled ‘Political- Economic Guidelines for the Economic Organization East,’ stated that the German’s objective was to use Russian resources for feeding the Wehrmacht and also for supplying German -occupied Europe. Because of this policy, 30 million Soviets were expected to die of starvation, and they had never intended to feed their Red Army captives in the first place. The plan for German soldiers to ‘live off the land’ was easier said than done as they ran out of supplies and their transportation from the rear was hampered by inadequate Soviet roads which were not metalled.

On 21 August, after much debate with his generals, Hitler decided to encircle Leningrad in the North instead of heading for Moscow, and to also attack Soviet forces in the South at Kiev. This decision turned out in the German’s favour as large Soviet forces were still amassed south of the Pripet Marshes and the Germans may have been trapped inside the city of Moscow had they tried to take it at that stage. Instead, Hitler sent Heinz Guderian’s Panzer Group south to Kiev in the Ukraine, which was a victory for the Germans. Having been ordered to hold Kiev by Stalin, 600,000 Soviet Red Army troops were captured in the most amazing encirclement battle in modern history. Many were trapped on the banks of the River Dnieper, as

⁶⁵ Rees, *War of the Century* Pp.97, 102; Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.45

Kiev fell on 18 September. “Hold out as long as you can,” Stalin had ordered.

General Zhukov, who had not agreed to the decision to hold the city walked out on his position as Chief of the General Staff. “We did wage encirclement battles across distances which we’d been simply incapable of imaging before,” said Hubert Menzel a German tank officer at Kiev. Hitler was elated, and believed that the German Wehrmacht should now push toward Moscow in an Operation entitled Typhoon. Despite the German victory at Kiev, it did in fact delay the assault on Moscow which inevitably turned out in the Soviets’ favour, due to the bad weather approaching.

The town of Vyazma was the last major obstacle in the German’s way to Moscow, and the Red Army soldiers who took part in the battle for this city were badly trained and poorly equipped. Sometimes the soldiers only possessed one rifle between five, and the 60-millimetre guns that they were expected to use that were left over from World War One, had no modern sighting devices. At the beginning of October the German 3rd and 4th Panzer Groups linked to trap five Soviet armies during the battle. “We were face to face with the Germans,” said Viktor Strazdovski, an eighteen year old Red Army soldier, “We didn’t feel confident...we felt doomed. There were four of us, with two rifles between us. The woods around us were ablaze.” The material needs of the Red Army had never been adequately met since its inception in 1918, and Soviet factories could not keep up with the enormous losses of weapons and equipment at the front during this devastating confrontation with the Germans. This caused bad morale in the ranks. Production could only replace 30

percent of rifles, 27 percent of tanks, 58 percent of guns and mortar, and 55 percent of war-planes lost in the first half of 1941.⁶⁶

Walter Schaefer-Kehnert, a German officer in the 11th Panzer Division, described the aftermath of the battle of Vyazma as something he would never forget, "...as that of a battlefield of old with thousands and thousands of dead and dying Russian soldiers lying in a field.." One German Panzer trooper described the amazing efforts of a group of Soviet Red Army soldiers rushing at them. Only the soldiers in the front row had rifles, and as these men were shot down, the row behind picked up their rifles and carried on.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the Soviets showed no sign of total collapse, as Hitler had expected. Even though the condition of the Red Army was poor, with a lack of coordination, weapons, and skilled leadership, they did have a large number of reserves that they could call upon. During the early months of the German assault these young men who were not well trained and who frequently turned up drunk on vodka,⁶⁸ were often put on the front-line and died in their first battle.

The Germans took 660,000 Red Army prisoners after the Battle of Vyazma and from the town of Bryansk nearby. Now the last obstacle on the road to Moscow had been eliminated. In October, Army Group North, with the help of Finnish troops had cut off the city of Leningrad and was trying to starve the inhabitants out. This siege would last 900 days, and over half a million citizens would die of starvation or dystrophy before the siege was lifted. After the destruction of Kiev, Army Group

⁶⁶ Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience* Pp. 119, 120

⁶⁷ Rees, *War of the Century: When Hitler fought Stalin* Pp.64-67

⁶⁸ Merridale, *Ivan's War* P.50

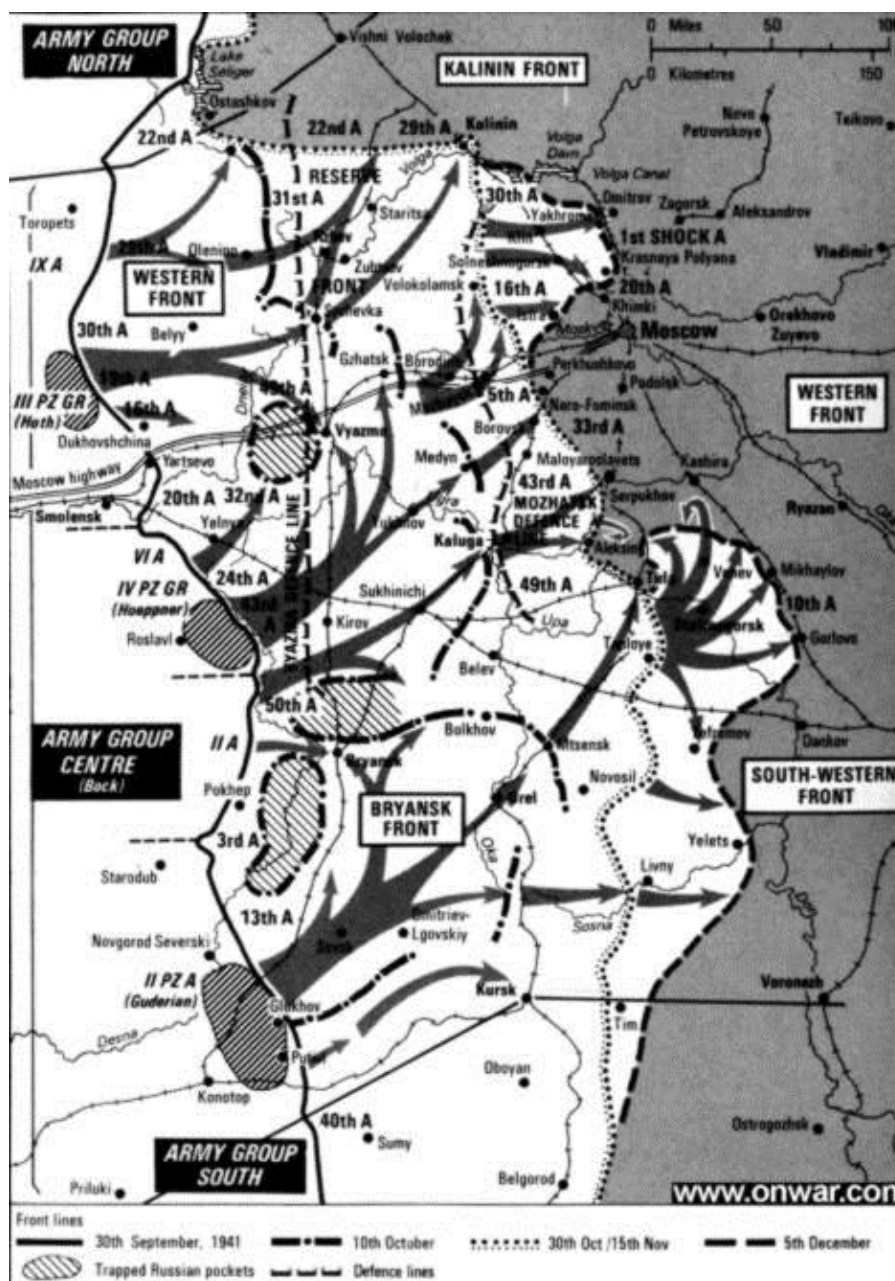
South was ready to pillage the Soviet Union's 'breadbasket' for the Third Reich. Only 90,000 Red Army troops defended Moscow and some Soviet cavalry units stealthily managed to sneak behind enemy lines and lay down mines in the forests that lay on the road to the city.⁶⁹

By Mid-October the Germans were roughly one hundred kilometres away from the city of Moscow. They had taken more enemy prisoners than any invading force in history, but by now should have won the war. Then something happened that was to start a series of events which would help to turn the tide of the war in favour of the Red Army. *The Rasputitsa*, the bi-annual season of rain and mud began, and the Blitzkrieg ground to a halt as Panzers, trucks, equipment, horses, and men were trapped in the thick mud caused by the winter rains. Richard Overy argues in his book, *Russia's War*, that despite the quagmire caused by the autumn rains, the German's progress was already slowing down due to the fanatical resistance of Soviet forces, and the transportation difficulties that they were experiencing over such vast areas of occupied territory.⁷⁰ Stalin knew that the frosts would follow allowing the Germans to continue on their march towards the capital and that he had to get the Red Army organised in a hurry.

Stalin ordered General Zhukov to call up Siberian rifle regiments and they were on their way across the Urals to help save Moscow. These units were made of strong, fit men used to harsh winter climates, who were equipped with warm padded clothing. They were expert skiers, flying along in white camouflage suits similar to

⁶⁹ Rees, *War of the Century* P.70

⁷⁰ Richard Overy, *Russia's War* (London: Penguin, 1997) Pp.113-114 'Rasputitsa' means literally the time without roads.



Operation Typhoon: 30 September – 5 December 1941

German armed forces regrouped in September, after the destruction of Soviet military forces around Kiev, with the intention of launching a final offensive against Moscow (*Operation Typhoon*) before winter. The attack began with promise but the autumn rains made it impossible to continue the operation until the winter frost arrived. By this time, German military units were exhausted and the Soviet defenders were demonstrating increasing resistance.⁷¹

⁷¹ "Operation Typhoon: 30 September- 5 December 1941" <http://www.onwar.com> Aug. 8. 2012

those worn by the Finnish ‘snow-ghosts’ in the Winter War. Red Army cavalry riding sturdy Cossack ponies also fought at the battle at Moscow. Due to the rains, the Germans forces had to wait a further three weeks before they were able to resume the attack on Moscow. Nevertheless their hopes were high, and they believed that Soviet resistance was virtually at an end.

Meanwhile, Moscow had come to a standstill, as people contemplated fleeing the capital. There were lootings and food riots, and people stormed the train stations in order to get out. Stalin contacted Zhukov in Leningrad, who was by now reinstated as Chief of the General Staff, and spoke to him at length over the phone asking what was needed for the defence of Moscow. Zhukov answered that he wanted tanks, artillery, and rockets, saying that, “if I get even part of the help that I asked for, we will hold Moscow.”⁷² Stalin’s Minister of Internal Affairs, Lavrentiy Beria, who had brutally instigated the infamous Katyn Forrest massacre of 22,000 Polish POWs in 1940, and had organised Trotsky to be murdered in Mexico in 1940, under Stalin’s orders, was in favour of leaving the city.⁷³ According to Stalin’s bodyguard, Beria, Georgi Malenkov, and Lazar Kaganovich, “lost their self control,” with Beria, in a show of cowardliness declaring, “We shall be shot down like partridges.”⁷⁴ On 15 October foreign embassies were told to prepare to leave for Kuybyshev on the Volga and NKVD interrogators also left, taking their most important prisoners with them. These men, who were senior officers in the Red Army, were badly needed to fight in the battle. They had been arrested due to the continuing purges, and faced execution. On a positive note, Stalin heard that Red Army divisions from Manchuria were

⁷² Rees, *War of the Century* P.71

⁷³ Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen*. (London: Penguin Books Ltd.,2005) Pp.362, 372-374

⁷⁴ Montefiore, *The Court of the Red Tsar* P.395

already starting to deploy to the area around Moscow, and that two of the Siberian rifle regiments had arrived.

Stalin considered leaving the capital, and in a crisis meeting with Beria, Molotov, Malenkov, and Aleksandre Shcherbakov, the new chief of the Red Army's political division, he made plans to blow up factories, bridges, railways, roads, and even the Moscow Metro before the city was taken by the enemy. On 18 October, the Central Committee members and their families left the city. Stalin hesitated in leaving Moscow, working and dosing down on a mattress in the Metro under Kirov Street, in a specially constructed compartment. He asked everyone, "What shall we do," and was encouraged by his mistress Valenchka and the positiveness of his daughter Svetlana not to abandon Moscow. Stalin called Zhukov again for his reassurance that Moscow could be held. Later that evening at his dacha in Semyonovskoe he made his decision to stay, saying "We'll stay here until victory."⁷⁵

The strong, positive, psychological effect that his decision had on the people and the soldiers of the Red Army cannot be overestimated. Stalin *was* the Soviet Union, and if he had run from Moscow, why shouldn't everyone have run, including the Red Army. A Harsh 'state of siege' was instituted from 20 October after Stalin's decision to stay and defend Moscow, with Beria's NKVD entrusted to keep the order. Beria, who was later proven to be a serial rapist and murderer of young Soviet women, had no reservations about the cruel and vicious methods used by his secret police to introduce the curfew Stalin ordered from midnight to 5am.⁷⁶ Citizens caught looting

⁷⁵ Ibid, Pp.395- 401

⁷⁶ Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen*, P.344

were shot dead, cars full of fleeing Muscovites were overturned, and panic was quelled in the most inhuman fashion. “It isn’t peacetime...you shoot them on the spot...”said Vladimir Ogryzko, commander of one of the NKVD units. “These severe measures, these beautiful measures, are the essence and content of war.”⁷⁷

The brewery horses that the Germans had brought with them to pull the heavy artillery guns nearly all died of heart failure, having had the enormous task of hauling heavy equipment through quicksand, mud, and snow since the beginning of the campaign. Others were killed to feed the quickly increasing number of starving troops. The German troops were surprised by the Soviet counter-attack of one million Red Army troops plus the Siberian units. Stalin had been able to utilise a large part of the 700,000 troops from his Far Eastern Army, who were usually used to guard against Japan. Soviet spy Richard Sorge had reported in September that Japan would not attack Russia. After first discussing this situation with his Far Eastern satraps, he ordered Kaganovich to organise non-stop trains to rush 400,000 fresh troops, 1,000 tanks and 1,000 planes across the Eurasian wastes and locate them behind Moscow.⁷⁸

By 30 October, the Germans were less than eighty kilometres from Moscow, but nevertheless, against the advice of General Artemev, Stalin decided to continue with the annual Red Army parade in Red Square that was due on 7 November. At the beginning of the parade during a snow storm, which hampered the vision of the Luftwaffe, during freezing temperatures and biting cold winds, Stalin spoke for half

⁷⁷ Rees, *War of the Century* P.74

⁷⁸ Montefiore, *The Court of the Red Tsar* Pp.403-405

an hour in inspiring tones, declaring, “If they want a war of extermination, they shall have one.” The dashing, heavily moustached Marshal Semion Budonny, the citizen’s favourite, rode up and down Red Square on his white stallion, sabre drawn, in a show of bravado for his fans. T-34 tanks, the best general purpose tank built in World War Two, and Red Army troops paraded in columns up Gorky Street and marched straight out to the front in a positive morale-building show that inspired both the citizens of Moscow and the Red Army itself.⁷⁹

The Germans resumed their advance on Moscow on 15 November during the winter freeze, making good progress, and by 4 December some units were only twenty kilometres from the capital. From this distance one Panzer unit tried to hit the Kremlin with a 10.5 centimetre gun without success. Their initial strategy was to try to break the morale of the Soviet people and the defending forces of the Red Army. Walter Schaefer-Kehnert, from the German Panzer unit that tried to shell the Kremlin remarked, “We thought only of the morale consequences on the citizens of Moscow-shooting to the town and the Kremlin!”⁸⁰

As the weather turned freezing cold and dropped to minus 30 degrees C, the German’s machine guns, which were precision instruments, became useless as the oil thickened. The Germans, having not prepared for such a long invasion and thinking that they would have won the war by now, lacked the appropriate winter clothing and froze in their summer coats. Their steel-capped jackboots hastened the onset of frostbite and there were up to 100,000 cases by Christmas 1941. On the other hand, the Red

⁷⁹ Ibid, P.403- 405

⁸⁰ Rees, *War of the Century* P.78

Army soldiers were given the advantage of warm padded camouflage suits, ‘ushanki’- round fur caps with ear flaps, and ‘valenki’- felt boots for winter warfare in a policy that had been adopted after the catastrophe in Finland where many wounded soldiers had frozen to death.⁸¹

The German soldiers were miserable, cold men, wrapped in scarves stolen from old Soviet women. Their toes and fingers froze during the night, and guards sitting in holes dug into the snow had to be checked every two hours in case they had frozen to death. These were a very different army of men from those that started out confident, strong, and full of bravado in June. Battle stress and the horrors of the war had caused many German troops to suicide, and most shot themselves while alone on sentry duty.⁸² Zhukov and the forces of the Red Army drove them back over 300 kilometres by 5 December, but lost 155,000 men in twenty days in the effort. The Blitzkrieg on Moscow had failed, and this was Stalin’s and the Red Army’s first victory against the German invasion since the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. The Axis offensive on Moscow came to an end.

On the retreat from Moscow, the hungry German soldiers stole livestock, vegetables, and even took the sugar used to feed the peasants bees. They used their furniture and houses for firewood. On 5 December Hitler signed his directive Number 39, ordering the Wehrmacht to assume a defensive stance on the whole front. However, German troops were unable to organize a solid defence at their present locations and were forced to pull back to merge their lines. As General Heinz

⁸¹ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* Pp.40-45

⁸² Ibid, P.45

Guderian, Commander of Panzer Group 2 wrote in his journal, “the offensive on Moscow failed...We underestimated the enemy’s strength, as well as his size and climate. Fortunately, I stopped my troops on 5 December; otherwise a catastrophe would be unavoidable.”⁸³ On 6 December the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, and on the following day, Hitler declared war on the United States of America. This declaration proved fortuitous to the Soviet Union, and in May 1942 Vyacheslav Molotov would meet with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States gaining a Lend-Lease treaty, and an alliance with Britain after meeting Winston Churchill in London.

As a result of the German’s defeat at Moscow, in an effort to restore the fighting capacity of its forces, Hitler had to move large numbers of troops out of France and other occupied countries to the Soviet-German front. Zhukov, in his book *Greatest Military Battles* wrote that, “Everyone from private to general displayed great heroism in fulfilling his sacred duty to the homeland, sparing neither his strength nor his very life in the defence of the city...Under hectic, almost catastrophically complicated and difficult conditions our troops were tempered, matured, accumulated experience and, once the absolutely essential minimum of arms were in their hands, moved from retreat and defensive manoeuvre to a powerful offensive.”⁸⁴

While Zhukov’s is a patriotic Soviet view of the Battle for Moscow, the harsh reality was that desertion within the Red Army was rife during the battle; tens of

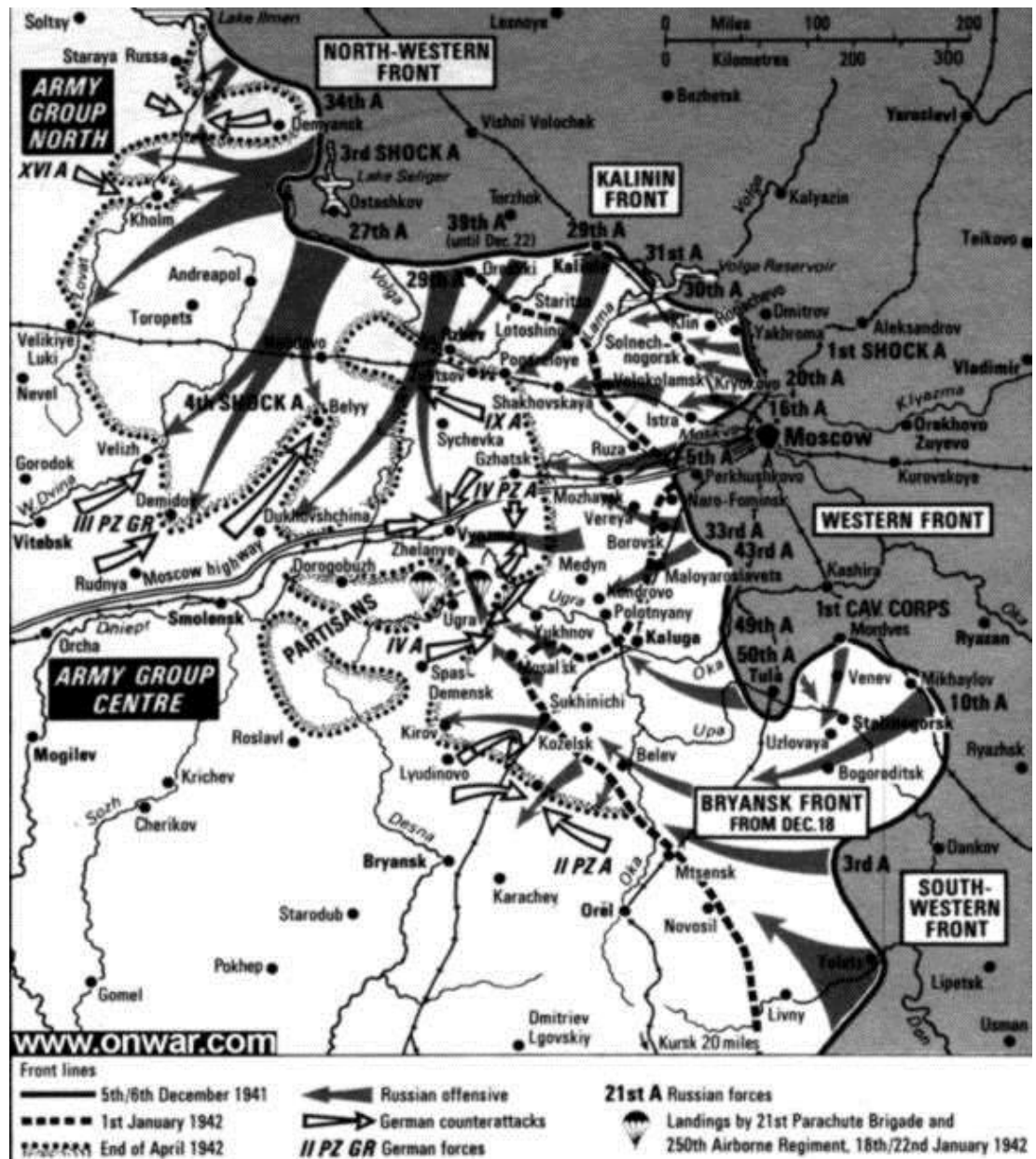
⁸³ Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten (Memoirs of a soldier)* (Smolensk: Rusich, 1999) P.229, 353-355

⁸⁴ Georgy K. Zhukov, Ed. Harrison E. Salisbury. *Marshal Zhukov’s Greatest Battles*, (Costa Mesa: The Noontide Press, 1991)P.102-103

thousands of the four million Soviet men and women who joined the ‘opolchentsy’ (untrained volunteers) were slaughtered at the front; ‘special troops’ were stationed behind the Red Army lines with machine guns ready to shoot dead any retreating soldiers; and that it was mainly ‘fear’ (of their officers and the Commissars) and ‘hate’ (for Nazism) that won the battle. By February 1942, 2,663,000 Red Army men and women had been killed in action.⁸⁵ To commemorate the battle, Moscow was awarded the title of ‘Hero City’ in 1965, on the 20th Anniversary of Victory Day.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Merridale, *Ivan's War* Pp.121-124, 146

⁸⁶Hero City: a Soviet honorary title awarded for outstanding heroism during the Great Patriotic War. “Battle of Moscow” *Moscow Encyclopedia*, ed. Moscow, 1997. According to the statute, the hero city is awarded the Order of Lenin, the Gold Star Medal, and the certificate of the heroic deed (*gramota*) from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Also the corresponding obelisk is installed in the city. Other cities that were awarded this honour were, Brest Fortress, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Odessa, Sevastopol, Kiev, Novorossiysk, Kerch, Minsk, Tula, Murmansk, and Smolensk.



Soviet Counteroffensive: December 6, 1941-April 30, 1942⁸⁷

⁸⁷ "Soviet Counteroffensive: December 6, 1941- April 30, 1942" <http://www.onwar.com> Aug. 12. 2012

Chapter 4

The Soviet Counter- Offensives

After the German offensive towards Moscow failed the Soviets launch a Counter-Offensive on the Kalinin Front and recaptured Krasnaya Polyana and several other cities in the immediate vicinity of Moscow. They did not however achieve their strategic objectives and were relatively depleted by that time. The Red Army launched more counter-offensives which lasted up until the end of April and included the collective Offensive Operations of Oboyan-Kursk, Lyuban, Demyansk, Orel-Bolkhov, and the Rzhev-Vyazma Strategic Offensive.⁸⁸ The area around Rzhev became known as the ‘Rzhev meat grinder’⁸⁹ because of the great number of Red Army soldiers killed there as they pushed the Germans away from Moscow. Details and accurate dates of the battles in these areas were not fully catalogued, and not much was known about them at all until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, the amount of casualties must have been enormous as the town of Rzhev and those surrounding it were completely destroyed.⁹⁰

Kleist’s First Panzer Group had not managed to take the Caucasus in November 1941, and Timoshenko’s forces had pushed them back at Rostov-on Don due to their weakly guarded left flank held by Hungarian troops. Many of Kleist’s men were

⁸⁸ John Erikson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin’s War with Germany: Volume One* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2003) P.305

⁸⁹ David M. Glantz, *Zhukov’s Greatest Defeats: The Red Army’s Epic Disaster in Operation Mars, 1942*. (Kansas: Kansas University Press, 1999) P.274

⁹⁰ Alina Makeyeva, *Komosmoskaya Pravda*. Newspaper Article, 19 February, 2009 (Moscow: Komsomolskaya Pravda Publishing House) *Komosmoskaya Pravda* is a daily Russian tabloid newspaper, founded on March 13, 1925. Entry on Komsomolskaya Pravda in the 3rd ed. of the *Great Russian Encyclopedia*.(Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2004)

suffering from frost-bite. Making matters worse, General Manstein's 11th Army in the Crimea had not yet managed to seize Sevastopol. Hitler was infuriated, having expected both Moscow and the Caucasus to have been captured by this time.

On the German front there were many changes. In November, Field-Marshal Rundstedt had a heart attack on the way to the Caucasus, and was vilified by Hitler, for authorising Kleist with Army Group South to withdraw at Rostov in the bitter cold of November 1941. He resigned, and was replaced by Reichenau the commander of the 6th Army.⁹¹ Reichenau was ordered to halt the retreat but was unable to. Rundstedt was forgiven by Hitler and sent home to Germany, but on sick leave. After having been recommended by Reichenau to Hitler, Friedrich Paulus was appointed to the position of Commander of the 6th Army on 6 January 1942, and on 12 January his patron Reichenau died in a plane crash on his way back to Germany. Hitler had dismissed Guderian the Commander of Panzer Group Two in December 1941, for protesting against his removal from the Moscow Front to Kiev. He had also been accused of withdrawal by Field Marshal von Kluge after Hitler sent orders against retreat.⁹² Colonel-General Hoepner and Colonel-General Strauss commanders of the 4th Panzer and 9th Army had also been dismissed. Field Marshal Fedor von Bock was dismissed for medical reasons (but returned for later offensives in 1942), and Hitler, furious that his army had been unable to take Moscow removed Walther von Brauchitsch as Commander-in-Chief on 19 December and took the position himself until the end of the war.⁹³

⁹¹ Alan Clark, *Barbarossa*, (London: Cassell, 1965) P.178

⁹² Gunthur Blumentritt, *The Fatal Decisions*. (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1956) P.65

⁹³ Ibid, P. 66

During 1941 and early 1942, the replacement of Soviet equipment and weapons lost at the front was a growing problem, and production in an occupied country was impossible to keep up. Any Allied assistance (Lend-Lease from the United States of America and Britain), was most welcome, even if the amount of tanks did “not fully satisfy demands of weapons required by the character of military activity on the German-Soviet front.” Whilst not being the solution to the Red Army holding off the Wehrmacht at Moscow and Leningrad in late 1941, Allied aid certainly played a significant role in the fighting of November–December 1941, and a role which continued to be important in Soviet operations during the spring and summer of 1942. Arctic convoys such as the PQ-12, sailed under the protection of destroyers from destinations like Loch Ewe in Scotland, and onto Reykjavik in Iceland headed for Murmansk, a port city in the extreme northwest of the Soviet Union. Vessels carried, among other equipment, planes like the British Hawker Hurricane fighter, the Curtis also known as the British ‘Kitty Hawk,’ Aerocobras, and Merlin engines, propellers, cartridges, mortar units, and even Studebaker jeeps and ‘International’ lorries. Murmansk was attacked by the Germans from Finland in 1941, but held out although it was almost destroyed and was awarded the honour of Hero City on 6 May, 1965.⁹⁴

Zhukov wrote, that in view of the success of the counter-offensives along the fronts to the west, that the Soviet forces were to begin offensives on all other fronts. The objectives were to defeat the enemy at Leningrad west of Moscow and also in the South. The main attack was to be directed at Army Group Centre. The combined

⁹⁴ Alexander Hill, “Allocation of Allied ‘Lend-Lease’ Aid to the Soviet Union Arriving with Convoy PQ-12, March 1942 - a State Defence Committee Decree.” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Volume 19, Issue 4, 2006

forces of the Northwest, Kalinin, Western and Bryansk fronts were to form pinchers to trap the main forces of the Germans around Rzhev, Vyazma and Smolensk. Despite Zhukov's reservations in a meeting with Stalin on 5 January that the offensives would not have enough artillery support to break through the enemy's lines, and that the Red Army would be worn down and suffer unjustified heavy losses, the decision had already been made by the leader with the backing of Timoshenko, Beria and Malenkov.

After the meeting Marshal Boris Shaposhnikov said to Zhukov, "It was foolish to argue. The Chief had already decided." Zhukov says he remarked, "Then why did he ask for my opinion?"⁹⁵ While Stalin may have asked for advice from his contemporaries, his ego decreed that he would always make the final decision. The broad plan for an offensive on all fronts did not succeed due to the lack of the required manpower and the necessary arms, which resulted in enormous losses of Red Army troops. Several units were surrounded and annihilated, including two of Zhukov's; Belov's cavalry group and General Yefremov's 33rd Army, were both trapped near Vyazma. Despite the victory at Moscow the Soviet troops were left tired, dispirited and short of arms, supplies, and transport.⁹⁶

On 1 January 1942 the 'United Nations Declaration', which was the basis of the future United Nations Organisation, was signed by twenty-six nations to agree to use all their means available to help fight the Axis powers and not to decide on a separate

⁹⁵ Zhukov, *Marshall Zhukov's Greatest Battles* P.91

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, Pp.91,107

cease-fire or peace, which improved the international position of the Soviet Union.⁹⁷ Growing numbers of new tanks, planes, artillery pieces, rockets and munitions began to reach the Red Army.⁹⁸ Even though the Red Army's winter counter-offensives drove the Germans from Moscow, Stalin still considered its defence a priority as the front line was still extremely close. In March 1942 Stalin called a conference which was held in the State Defence Committee in Moscow to discuss the future of the summer campaigns. According to Zhukov, this meeting was attended by Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, Marshal Semion K. Timoshenko, Marshal Boris Shaposhnikov, Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevsky, Major-General I. Bagramyan, and himself. Zhukov affirms that during this conference Stalin, in a flood of overconfidence in the resources and position of the Red Army went against his advice and decided on a plan to attack the Germans in the south to try to retake Kharkov, which had been captured in late October 1941 after two months of bitter fighting by Timoshenko's forces.⁹⁹ Zhukov states that Timoshenko was in agreement with Stalin's plans. In September 1941, Stalin had made Budyenny a scapegoat for losing Kiev and dismissed him as Commander-in-Chief of the South-Western Front, replacing him with Timoshenko. Budyenny was then placed in charge of the Reserve Front.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, by early spring German morale was up, with the warm weather almost erasing memories of the bitter cold during the previous winter battles. On 5 April Hitler's Headquarters issued orders for the campaign to bring 'final victory in the East.' Operation Northern Lights was to bring the siege of Leningrad to an end,

⁹⁷ For the names of the nations involved see Appendix Number Three. "United Nations Membership." *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 12. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1994) P. 148

⁹⁸ Zhukov, *Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles* P.113

⁹⁹ Zhukov, *Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles*. P.118

¹⁰⁰ Montefiore, *The Court of the Red Tsar* P.381

and Operation Blue would take place in the South. Bock, who had been reassigned, was not pleased about Hitler's decision not to deploy reserves into the area, and wrote in his diary on 8 May, "My great concern – that the Russians might pre-empt us with their own attack..."¹⁰¹

At dawn on 12 May Timoshenko launched his offensive with 640,000 men, 1,200 tanks, 13,000 guns and mortars and 926 combat aircraft from around Volchansk. On 14 May Timoshenko's forces smashed through Sixth Army's defences both North and South of Kharkov, the Ukrainian capital and fourth largest Soviet industrial centre. In seventy-two hours Paulus lost sixteen divisions taking a battering from all sides.¹⁰² He appealed to Bock who was now commander of Army Group South, and asked for reinforcements and was sent the 23rd Panzer Division. Bock eventually convinced General Franz Halder, the German army's Chief of Staff, that the situation at Kharkov was critical. Halder in turn appealed to Hitler, who immediately ordered the transfer to the Kharkov sector of every Air unit in the southern zone not already involved in critical combat duties.¹⁰³

Apart from the few Lend-Lease planes that arrived from Murmansk, the Soviet fighter planes included a number of the effective new models, such as the Yakovlev Yak- 7B and the Lavotchikin La -5, but unfortunately the vast bulk were still old-fashioned and inferior posing no real threat to the Luftwaffe's newest machines. The Polikarpov I -153 Chaika (Gull), the I-15 Chato (Snub-nose) and the truncated I-167 Rata (Rat) all dated from the Spanish Civil War. The first two, both biplanes were no

¹⁰¹ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.63

¹⁰² Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.65

¹⁰³ Joel S.A. Hayward, "The German Use of Air Power at Kharkov May 1942, The Battle of Kharkov." *Air Power History* 44.2 (Summer 1997) Pp.18-19

match for the strikingly superior German counterparts and even the latter, a monoplane of better design, usually came off worst in aerial combat. The Luftwaffe played a key role in smashing the major Soviet offensive around Kharkov. 4th Air Corps (Fliegerkorp IV) and elements of 8th Air Corps (Fliegerkorp VIII), commanded by General Field-Marshal Wolfram von Richtofen, who was a cousin of the infamous World War One flying ace, 'The Red Baron,' distinguished themselves in a series of non-stop defensive missions, greatly aiding the army as it fought back and destroyed the Soviet forces. From the onset of the battle at Kharkov German fighters controlled the airspace and shot down numerous Soviet aircraft. Assisting the struggle on the ground, dive bombers and bombers attacked with bombs and other weapons, smashing enemy assembly points, attacking tanks, batteries and columns.¹⁰⁴

Even though Timoshenko had opened up broad gaps in the North and South of Kharkov, and had created the right conditions for introducing the bulk of his army and mobile formations after two days of unchecked progress, he failed to seize the opportunity to throw his Corp effectively into the battle in order to complete an encirclement of the German forces around Kharkov. His plan had been to launch two convergent attacks with his South-western Front. His main force was Lt. General A. M. Gorodnyanskii's 6th Army and Major. General L. V. Bobkin's, "Army Group." They were to attack from the south of Kharkov in the Barvenkovo area. 28th Army and formations from 21st and 28th Armies were in the Volchansk area in the north. Both groups were to strike simultaneously towards the west and join behind Kharkov

¹⁰⁴ Haywood, *Air Power History* 44.2 (Summer 1997) P.18-19

where the pincers¹⁰⁵ were to make an effort to trap most of Paulus's 6th Army. His force of twenty- three rifle divisions, two cavalry and two tank corps, outnumbered the German formations they opposed.¹⁰⁶

Opposing Timoshenko's forces, Kleist had struck at the southern side of the Barvenkovo salient before dawn on 17 May, advancing roughly sixteen kilometres before midday. His panzers had come upon strong resistance from Soviet T-34s and anti-tank guns and had to engage at close range otherwise their shells "bounced off like fireworks."¹⁰⁷ In the words of a German observer, "The Russian tanks come out of their emplacements like tortoises, and try to escape by zigzagging. Some of them still wear their camouflage netting like green wigs."¹⁰⁸

Timoshenko had asked for reinforcements to stop Kleist, and according to Nikita Krushchev, who was a political commissar at the time; Stalin would not allow him to withdraw. Krushchev commented at the Tenth Party Congress in 1956 in his indictment of the leader, "Contrary to common sense, Stalin rejected our suggestion and issued the order to continue the operation aimed at the encirclement of Kharkov, despite the fact that at this time many army concentrations were themselves actually threatened with encirclement and liquidation."¹⁰⁹ Zhukov, whose statement backs up Khrushchev's, says he was present during a phone conversation between Stalin and General Aleksandr Vasilevsky, the Acting Chief of General Staff and said, "despite concerns and urgings to halt the Kharkov operation," on 18 May, Stalin had

¹⁰⁵ See Appendix Four for a diagram of a strategic pincer movement

¹⁰⁶ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.65

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, P. 66

¹⁰⁸ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.73

¹⁰⁹ Nikita S. Khrushchev, "The Crimes of the Stalin Era: Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." Annotated by Boris I. Nicolaevsky. Cited in: *The New Leader*. (New York: The New Leader, 1962)P.41

refused.¹¹⁰ Timoshenko called off the offensive on 19 May, but it was too late and in a bloody catastrophe, 250,000 Red Army men and women were trapped south of Kharkov between Kleist's First Panzer Army and General Paulus's Sixth Army.¹¹¹ This is a prime example of Stalin's tyrannical personality and belief in his military genius, causing senseless suffering to the soldiers of the Red Army.

For two weeks the trapped armies had fought back with 'suicidal bravery,' with tales emerging of women soldiers 'hiding in straw and jumping out shooting at the enemy.' Troops linking arms rushed enemy lines at night, only to be shot down in their thousands by German machine guns. Eventually the Soviet 6th and 57th Armies were massacred in what was to be later called 'the Barvenkovo mousetrap.' Only one in ten escaped. The Germans shot as many Red Army soldiers as they could; Boris Vitman, a Red Army soldier who was at the battle said, "I thought they were real butchers because they were still firing when there were so many dead. And I realised that they couldn't take so many people prisoner, so they were trying to destroy as many of us as possible."¹¹² They did however take at least 240,000 Red Army prisoners, 2,000 guns, and the bulk of Timoshenko's tank force, and despite losing 20,000 troops; it was a great victory for the Germans in the Crimea. The prisoners were kept in barbed-wire enclosures guarded by SS soldiers, where the wounded were left to die, the political Commissars were taken away for questioning and Jews were shot.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Zhukov, *Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles*. P.121

¹¹¹ Haywood, *Air Power History* 44.2 (Summer 1997) P.18-19

¹¹² Rees, *War of the Century* P.127

¹¹³ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.67

Timoshenko's plan was ruined and this led to a German breakthrough in the South. Important areas of the Donets Basin were now in the enemy's hands, and they were in an excellent position for staging Operation Blau (Blue), their future summer campaign. Soviet propaganda explained Timoshenko's disastrous campaign in *The History of the Great Patriotic War Volume II*, an official Soviet history written post-war in 1960, by stating that, "Timoshenko was misled by false intelligence reports stating Bock was concentrating a large Panzer force near Zmier, 25 kilometres south of Kharkov, and as a result delayed introducing his mobile formations which: 'negatively' affected the development of the operation. By this time the enemy had succeeded in pulling up reserves and in organizing the rear area defences."¹¹⁴

The Germans held the Donbas (The Don River Basin region), and the Ukraine and now Hitler wanted to continue with his plan to seize oil in the south to supply his armies. He also aimed to attack armament factories, and secure a position on the Volga River at Stalingrad. The capture of Stalingrad itself was not his main objective at this point. He discussed his summer offensives with Hoth, Paulus, Bock, Kleist and Richtofen, in a conference at Poltava on 1 June 1942, the headquarters for Army Group South. The first stage of Operation Blue was to capture Voronezh and the second was to trap the bulk of the Red Army forces in a pincer movement west of the Don. The 6th Army was to move onto Stalingrad to secure the north-eastern flanks, while Kleist's First Panzer Army and the 17th Army would occupy the Caucasus. On 5 June the 6th Army started to move north-eastward to the Volchansk area, and by 10 June companies from the 297th Infantry Division began to cross the Donets by

¹¹⁴ Prospelov, P.N. (ed.) et al. *History of the Great Patriotic War, Vol. II* (Moscow: Institute of Marxism- Leninism of the Central Committee of the KPPS, 1960) p.413

assault boats. High in spirits, due to the victory at Kharkov, Hitler was assured of his armies' supremacy and consequent victory.¹¹⁵

On 19 June a German light aircraft was shot down just outside the German lines. Soviet soldiers discovered on one of the recovered bodies a document with the entire orders for Operation Blue. The body was later identified as Major Reichel, the operations officer of 23rd Panzer Division. Stalin with his usual paranoia dismissed the documents thinking that they were a trap by the Germans, whom he believed would again strike towards Moscow.¹¹⁶ Once again Stalin had difficulty in overcoming his paranoia to be of any military use in the battle so far.

On 28 June the Germans attacked virtually along the whole of the southern front. 2nd German Army and Hoth's 4th Panzer attacked towards Voronezh, not north towards Orel and Moscow. Hoth's panzer divisions advanced rapidly with Richtofen's Stukas smashing strong points or tank concentrations ahead. Stalin sent more tank brigades from the Soviet Supreme Command (Stavka), reserve and also from Timoshenko's South-Western Front, but due to communication problem they were delayed. On 30 June, Paulus' 6th Army crossed the start line prepared on the eastern side of the river Donets with the Second Hungarian Army on its left flank and the very experienced First Panzer Army on its right.¹¹⁷ Many Red Army soldiers were cut off by the speedy advance and attacked from behind or from the flank. They often played dead until the Germans went to investigate, and then shot them at close range. But for the Soviets the chaos was so great owing to communication

¹¹⁵ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.70; Rees, *War of the Century* P.129

¹¹⁶ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.71-72

¹¹⁷ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.72

breakdowns that staff officers and commanders had to fly around in biplanes, dodging the German Messerschmitts, to try to find their troops.¹¹⁸

The Soviet forces that opposed the Germans were hurriedly formed reserve armies, poorly trained, ill- equipped, and badly organised and the Germans overwhelmed and humiliated them, creating a mood of deep despair especially when the Russians realised that they were alone to endure the German onslaught. The anticipated Second Front which they had hoped that their allies would open in the summer of 1942 never eventuated, increasing the sense of terrible hopelessness. In the words of Gamlet Dallakian a Red Army soldier, “Smashed at Kharkov, bled white and forced to retreat to the Don, we thought that the war was lost and we could never withstand such a strong enemy. There seemed no way of stopping the Germans... they were breathing down our necks the whole time we were retreating towards the Don.”¹¹⁹

The Red Army made many mistakes as instructions arrived too late due to lack of equipment and training. During the retreat from Kharkov troops in some divisions were issued only two shells per day for inadequate battalion guns such as the 45 mm, which could only penetrate the German tanks at a distance of less than 100 metres. “We had little confidence in the effectiveness of such a weapon,” said Mikhail Borisov, the sole survivor of five different artillery crews. German Messerschmidt planes toyed with Soviet troops chasing and firing, then heading off, further

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 73

¹¹⁹ Michael K. Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed*. (South Yorkshire: Penn and Sword Military, 2007) P.23

humiliating them.¹²⁰ It was dusty and burning hot, but the Germans were full of confidence. In the meantime, the Soviet troops felt an overwhelming spirit of inferiority, walking as if asleep, desperate and exhausted. Their morale had plunged to the deepest depths.

Hitler wanted to cut off Russia's oil supplies from the Caucasus and also to cut off Lend-Lease supplies through Iran. He sent twenty-five divisions east. By July Soviet forces had been beaten back to the Don where many were trapped and drowned in the bend of the river. According to Alexander Fortov, an Artillery unit commander of 112th Division, "There was constant bombing by the Germans, and in the chaos no food got through to us... we were trying to survive on emergency rations. And the heat was terrible. We found most of the wells dried out."¹²¹

The retreating Red Army was in chaos. Due to Stalin's belief that Hitler's main attack would be directed at Moscow, forces had been diluted in the South. The German armies were in high spirits marching along at 10 kilometres per hour in the spring weather, to keep pace with the motorised units. They had new equipment and morale was high after their victory at Kharkov. They raided everything in the villages they passed, from turnips and onions in vegetable gardens to chicken, geese, and ducks, leaving the peasants to starve to death. "Our lads have stolen three jugs of milk," wrote a Hungarian soldier in his diary, after he and his companions had terrorised some local village girls.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid, P.24

¹²¹ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P.27

¹²² Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.77



Operation Blue: Second German Summer Offensive June 28 - November 18, 1942

The German losses sustained in the first year of warfare led to a less ambitious series of objectives being specified for the second summer campaign. Hitler's focus was on gaining control of the resources in the Caucasus. After the campaign was underway, the city of Stalingrad on the Volga became another objective. The extended left flank was eventually defended by relatively weak German allied armed forces from Rumania, Hungary and Italy.¹²³

¹²³ "Operation Blue: Second German Summer Offensive- June 28- November 18, 1942" <http://www.onwar.com> 13 Aug. 2012

Hitler was desperate to get his forces to the Caucasus, to access the oil for his tanks, planes, and mobile units and to deprive the Red Army of the same. The collapse of Kharkov had made him overconfident and in his Directive No. 25 of 23 July 1942, in a gigantic military blunder he insisted that the Caucasus and Stalingrad be attacked simultaneously. “In a campaign which has lasted little more than three weeks, the deep objectives outlined by me for the south flank of the Eastern Front have been largely achieved. Only weak enemy forces have succeeded in escaping encirclement and reaching the far bank of the Don.” He split Army Group South into two groups, A and B. Group A (Operation Edelweiss), was to head towards the South and capture the Caucasus, while Group B (Operation Fischreiher), named after the fish in the Volga, was to move towards Voronezh and Stalingrad.¹²⁴

This order caused a dilution of the German offensive because one of their strongest mobile formations was diverted away from Stalingrad. Against Halder’s advice, Hitler had sent 4th Panzer, which was originally on the left flank of the advance; southwards to Rostov, taking much needed mechanised support away from his infantry, because he thought that the 6th Army, being undefeated so far in battle, could secure Stalingrad on its own. Lieutenant Anatoly Mereshko, who would one day become Deputy Commander of the Warsaw Pact said, “Had the Panzer division been kept where it was supporting a direct attack on Stalingrad, I think the city would have fallen to the Germans in July 1942.” Hitler’s hubris and military blunder

¹²⁴ Fischreiher means Heron. Christopher Chant, ‘Fischreiher,’ entry, *The Encyclopedia of Codenames of World War Two* (Routledge, 1986); Erikson, *The Road to Stalingrad* P.379; Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* Pp.80-81

in this situation was another quirk of fate that was to aid the Red Army in its struggle against the Germans.¹²⁵

Field Marshal List was to take Army Group A into the Caucasus and Field Marshal Baron von Weich was to command Army Group B, with the 6th Army being its largest formation. Hitler had changed the whole formation and timing of the original plans for Operation Blue. The ensuing traffic jam that occurred as the lines of the 6th Army and the 4th Panzer Army crossed, caused a delay of two weeks, with the 4th Panzer commandeering most of the fuel.¹²⁶ Despite his objections, Manstein's 11th Army was withdrawn from the south and sent to Leningrad when Hitler reopened the northern offensive in an attack codenamed 'Northern Lights.' Manstein said, "Could there be any justification for taking the 11th Army away from the southern wing...and employing it on a task which was palpably less important..."¹²⁷ In early August, due to the slow progress of his objectives Hitler reverted back to the original plan and placed the 4th Panzer back to its position guarding the 6th Army's left flank as they travelled towards Stalingrad. Time and effort was the price that the German armies had to pay as a consequence of Hitler's lack of good military sense.

There was a danger that Stalingrad may not fall quickly and the longer it took, the more the Germans were putting themselves at risk of a counter-attack on their flanks. The inferior Romanian 3rd and 4th Armies, Hungarian 2nd Army and Italian 8th Army on their flanks were unreliable and of a much weaker calibre than their

¹²⁵ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* Pp.1, 19-21

¹²⁶ Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russian -German Conflict 1941-45* P.211

¹²⁷ Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russian -German Conflict* P.22

superior counterparts.¹²⁸ The German lines now extended an extra 400 kilometres than they did at the beginning of the summer offensives and they could not afford to place reserves behind the allied armies.¹²⁹

The soldiers of the Red Army were desperate, struggling to get to Stalingrad in the heat and dust of the open steppe of the Don Basin. There was chaos, and the soldiers suffered from a lack of communications equipment, and ammunitions. They were tired, hungry, dispirited, frantic, and depressed, thinking that the end had come for them and the Soviet Union. A sense of failure spread through the ranks, and the confidence that had been built up after the victory at Moscow was rapidly disappearing.

¹²⁸ "The Allied Axis Armies and Stalingrad." *Military Affairs*. Vol. 29, Summer, 1965 P.62

URL <http://www.jstor.org/prospero.murdoch.edu.au/stable/1983962>

¹²⁹ Joachim Wieder and Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel, *Stalingrad: Memories and Reassessments*. Trans. Helmut Bogler (London: Cassell Group, 1962) P.16

Chapter 5

At the Gates of Stalingrad

There have probably been hundreds of books written about this battle. And I think that for as long as people will be living on this Earth, they will remember it. And this is not surprising, for it was the largest battle in military history, in which socialism and fascism came face to face. For us, it was life and death which met on the Volga. And it was life which won the fight.

Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky¹³⁰

The battle of Stalingrad began when units of the Soviet 62nd Army met the German 6th Army on the River Chir, a tributary of the Don on 17 July 1942.¹³¹ On that day 40th Panzer Corps made a small encirclement of Red Army troops at Millerovo and instantly wheeled south-eastwards towards to Morozovsk leaving other German units to round up the Red Army soldiers they had captured. “We were starved to death,” recounted Stepan Odinkov, a clerk in the 60th Soviet Cavalry Division who was captured that day and crammed into an open wire cage with other Red Army troops. “On the best days we received a little rye in boiled water...we were constantly beaten with rifle butts.”

¹³⁰ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P.5

¹³¹ *Ibid*, xxx

On 19 July Stalin ordered the Stalingrad Defence Committee to prepare the city for war because of the rapid German advance. He feared Rostov would not hold out for long, and after fierce fighting in the city it fell on 23 July, but many Red Army soldiers escaped as the 64th Soviet Army was pushed back to the River Don.¹³² “It was a time of terrible panic,” Red Army soldier Tamara Kalmykova remembered, “The commanders ran off first, the rest followed.” Stalin dismissed Major-General Kolpakchi the commander of the inexperienced 62nd reservist Army, on 27 July for over committing his troops and allowing the Germans to push back his unit to the main line of defence on the Don.¹³³ Stalin had to fly Colonel Zhuralev from the Soviet Supreme Command (Stavka), into the encirclement to take over.¹³⁴

As the Soviet forces fell further back, on 28 July Stalin issued the infamous decree 227 of “Not a step back,” (Ni Shagu Nazadi!). The order affirmed a lack of discipline in the troops and it gave permission for ‘backmarker’ divisions (which included tanks), to shoot ‘cowards and panic –mongers’ as traitors. Therefore, the Red Army not only had to contend with the fear of being killed by the Germans but also by their own government. Penal colonies were established, (shtrafiriye) and also Barrage squads (zagraditelriye) were set up in the rear of ‘shaky’ divisions, which provided a heavy curtain of artillery fire directed in front of friendly troops to screen and protect them. Penal units were made up of soldiers who had made unsanctioned retreats, or were Gulag prisoners who were stripped of their medal and rank.¹³⁵ They were sent on the most dangerous and risky missions (such as mine clearing during an

¹³² Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.78-79

¹³³ Erikson, *The Road to Stalingrad* P.362 ; Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P.xxx

¹³⁴ Ibid , 366

¹³⁵ Alexander V. Pyl’cyn, *Penalty Strike: The Memoirs of a Red Army Penal Company Commander, 1943-45*. (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2009). Pp. 9, 21; Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.84-85

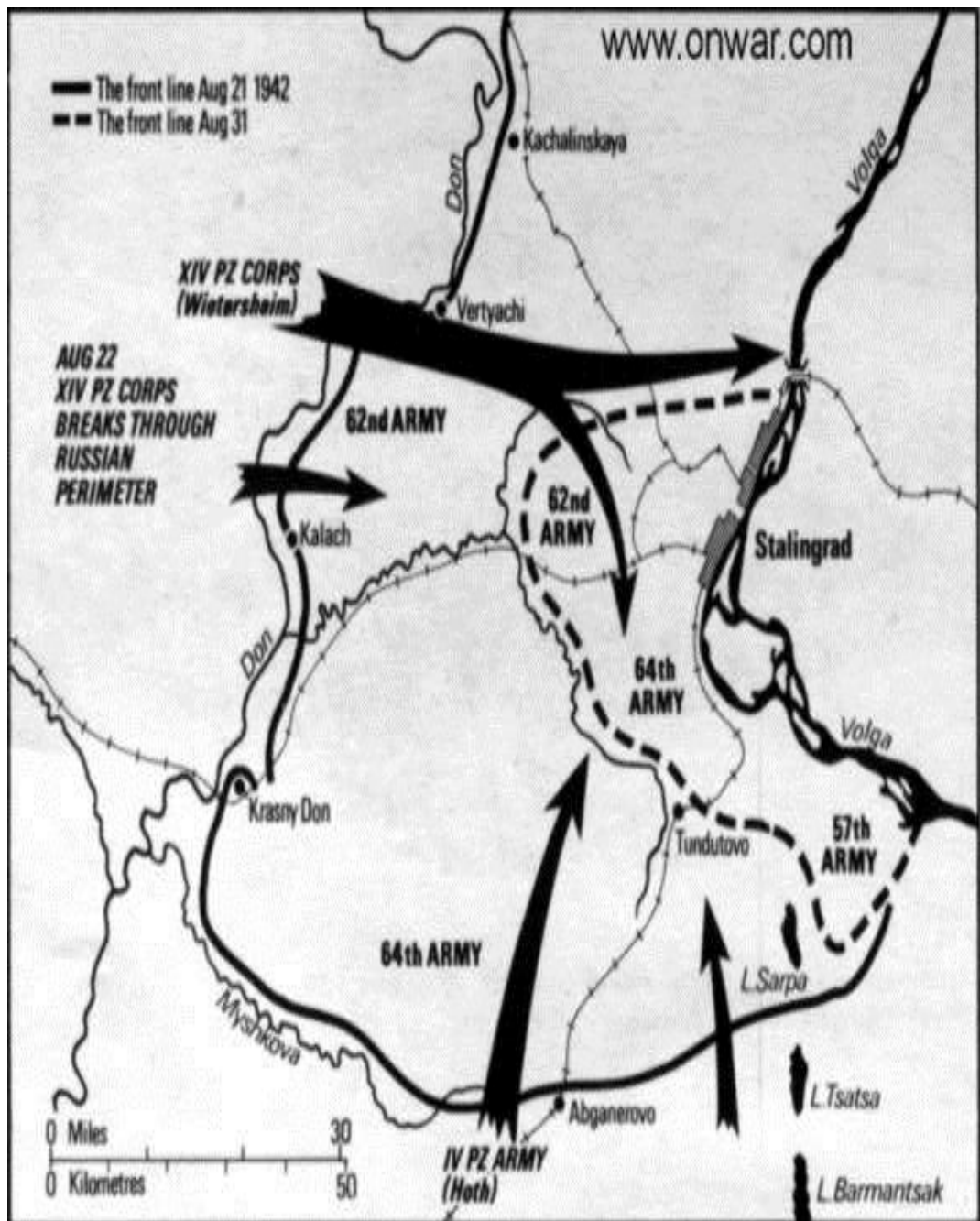
attack), in the most treacherous areas, in order to repay their debt to the Motherland, usually in blood, but mostly in death. Soldiers caught retreating also had to contend with the knowledge that the Soviet state would make their families pay by depriving them of state allowances and assistance. Eventually they became the German's worst nightmare as they had nothing more to lose.¹³⁶

With temperatures recorded up to '53 degrees in the sun' and a huge water shortage the Germans continued advancing across the Don steppe. It was "as hot as Africa...with huge dust clouds" wrote General Strecker commander of German 11 Corps. The Red Army polluted wells, poured petrol over grain, and adhered to the 'scorched earth' policy on their retreat towards Stalingrad, depriving their enemies of much needed supplies. There was an increase of dysentery, typhus from lice, and paratyphus¹³⁷ In Cossack country the Germans fared better, as the inhabitants who were mostly anti-Soviet gave them eggs, salted cucumbers, milk, ham and even honey. Strecker remarked, "I've never eaten so much as here...we eat honey with spoons until we're sick and in the evening we eat boiled ham."

Hitler was now determined to capture Stalingrad. It was an important industrial centre and the Volga River on which it stood was a vital supply route from the Caucasus. Cutting oil supplies to Moscow and other northern cities via the river would weaken the Soviets even further. He may also have wanted to take the city due

¹³⁶ Nikolai Poroskov, "Stalingrad: The Battle that broke Hitler's back". *Russian Life Magazine*. Vol. 45.6 (November-December 2002) P.34

¹³⁷ "Water-related diseases- Communicable diseases 2001." *World Health Organisation Website*. 31 October 2008, 6 October 2012 (a fever similar to typhus fever that is induced by salmonella bacteria caused by open wounds and poor sanitary conditions such as polluted water and passes from person to person). http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/typhoid/en/; "paratyphoid fever" Vol.9. *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* P. 148



Approach to Stalingrad

By mid-August 1942, German armoured forces were pressing the Soviet armies defending the front before Stalingrad into the city itself. Panzers attached to 6th Army pushed east in conjunction with 4th Panzer Army striking northward.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ "Approach to Stalingrad" <http://www.onwar.com/maps> Sept. 23.2012

to it being Joseph Stalin's namesake, which would be a devastating blow to the morale of the Red Army and the Soviet people. The 4th Panzer Army and Paulus' 6th Army converged on the city, which was situated in a difficult position for the exhausted Red Army to defend, as the river Volga formed one natural barrier, and the Germans surrounded the city on the remaining three sides. On 23 August the Germans bombed Stalingrad with 600 bombers. "When the bombing began it was really horrible, said Albert Burkovski, who was only 14 at the time, "I can still remember the planes, the noise they were making, and it became real hell."¹³⁹

180,000 civilian helped build rushed and crude defences, trenches, fire-points, and tank traps.¹⁴⁰ They were trapped anyway, as Stalin callously did not allow most of the people to evacuate in the early days of the attack. There were limited medical supplies in the city to cater for such a catastrophe, and orphaned children struggled to survive in the ruins of the city scavenging for food wherever they could. Some children on the west bank of the river helped transport wounded Red Army soldiers down to the landing stage by pushing them in carts. The battle was a combined effort at times, as the citizens did their best to help the Red Army defend the city.

Stalin ordered the Red Army to retain the Stalingrad bank of the Volga, by any means. The city had unexpectedly become the Soviet's main objective, almost a focal point of the entire war.¹⁴¹ Leading the German 6th Army was the refined and aristocratic Friedrich Paulus, while on the Soviet side was the tough, tactical General Vasily Chuikov. He was formerly appointed to the post of commander of the 62nd

¹³⁹ Rees, *War of the Century* P.142-143

¹⁴⁰ Erikson, *The Road to Stalingrad* P.364

¹⁴¹ Rees, *War of the Century* P.152

Army on 10 September, being personally recommended by General Andrei Yermenko to Stalin.¹⁴² In his book *Stalingrad the Fateful Siege*, Antony Beevor depicts Chuikov as brutal and ruthless, who executed many Red Army soldiers, but Michael K Jones, who used Anatoly Mereshko as his military advisor for his book *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed*, was told by the Soviet Lieutenant, who served with Chuikov at Stalingrad, that he was, “a man of incredibly strong will, very brave – almost desperately brave and I think that if someone else had been in charge – someone with a different temperament – it would not have been possible for us to hold Stalingrad... He had persistence and perseverance”¹⁴³ Another testimony to him, and this time to his humanity, was told by Mereshko,

Officers received more butter, biscuits, and sugar...When Chuikov took command something astonishing happened. Commanders of units were strongly encouraged to bring their rations into the dugout and share it with their soldiers...In fact, over time, it was considered almost a criminal offence if an officer ate or smoked without sharing with his soldiers.

Despite his perceived brutal nature, it would seem that deep down Chuikov had a heart for the common soldier, and it was that quality that helped him to keep up the morale and fighting spirit of the Red Army's forces who were trapped in the city.

The morale and mood of the Soviet army changed at Stalingrad, which enabled the soldiers of the Red Army to bond, unite, and become motivated; this was a

¹⁴² Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* P.388

¹⁴³ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed*. P.69 Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P.71

critical change that helped them survive and eventually gain the victory. A tough, resourceful, and insightful leader like Chuikov was essential to that change.¹⁴⁴

Mereshko said that, “There was a special mood amongst our troops which came into being during the battle itself. Courage was the watchword under the command of Chuikov. Men were proud to be part of this army and their devotion led ordinary soldiers to perform extraordinary deeds.” A powerful bond of true comradeship grew between the Red Army soldiers trapped in Stalingrad during their time together. Those that survived fought side by side, day by day. They were able to get to know one another and care for each other’s welfare; which was a very different story to that on the steppes, where a soldier may never see the same face again.

Despite the fact that the Soviet communication system was extremely unsophisticated, the soldiers fought back hard. Night raids, which the Germans hated, became popular with the Red Army soldiers due to numerous Luftwaffe attacks in daylight hours. Storm Groups were formed by Chuikov and General Alexander Rodimtsev, whose 13th Guards Division had been sent by Stavka to give vital support to the defenders, and whose intervention helped save the city.¹⁴⁵ These groups, usually consisting of only a handful of soldiers, became extremely popular as the soldiers were able to pick their own comrades and were able to look out for each other. Rank was not important either, with privates and lieutenants fighting side by side, and volunteers for this aggressive style of urban warfare were abundant. It consisted of close combat fighting with spades and knives and shocked and jolted the invaders out of their routine way of fighting.

¹⁴⁴ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed*. P.80

¹⁴⁵ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P.94

One particular raid became very famous and a tremendous morale boost to all Red Army soldiers who heard about it during the battle. It was the siege of what later came to be known as 'Pavlov's House.' On 27 September, a reconnaissance unit led by Sergeant Jacob Pavlov cleared a house on Penzenskaya Street of its German inhabitants using grenades, which became the storm group soldier's constant companion. The defence became a legend, as Red Army soldiers held out for over fifty days. It became a Stalingrad within Stalingrad and the positive psychological effects upon the defenders of the city were enormous. Chuikov stated that, "The soldier in a storm group must have initiative and boldness... rely on himself...and they feel that the commanders really trust them."¹⁴⁶

The siege was even reported in the Soviet Press, and Pavlov was made a Hero of the Soviet Union. Other Red Army soldiers who were there say that the real hero of the siege was the inspirational Captain Naumov, who fought bravely by their side defending the house, which became part of an integrated defence line. He died in an attack over the road, at 'The Mill House' on 24 November, while Pavlov, after being wounded was carried away on a stretcher. The story that twenty-four brave Soviet multi-national Red Army soldiers hung on alone for fifty-eight days was propaganda, but was necessary at the time to give the impression of a cohesive national front, fighting on, not giving in, despite the almost impossible odds and hardships of the battle at Stalingrad.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* Pp 145-151

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, Pp. 155-156

Street fighting was very important at Stalingrad; to survive the Red Army had to find a different system of fighting from the German's. It transformed the psychological atmosphere of the battle and the common soldier gained a sense of hope and self belief. Urban guerrilla warfare that required hand-to-hand fighting, using knives and spades became the order of the battle. Clearing houses was dangerous work and Suren Mirzoyan, one of the survivors of Stalingrad said of his encounters with German soldiers during these terrifying operations, "...we had knives. I felt only one thing- kill, kill. A beast... If you were not strong enough physically, the German would have swallowed you." ¹⁴⁸ These primitive and savage encounters were numerous and the Red Army soldier walked with death every day, but somehow they were in control of their own destiny during the siege of Stalingrad, more so than they had been during the total chaos of battles on the open fields of the plains and steppes.

Every building, factory, and street became a battlefield at Stalingrad and victory was measured in feet and yards. With buildings becoming fortresses equipped with anti-tank guns and mortars, and surrounded by barbed wire and minefields, Chuikov famously described the fortifications, "All these measures are aimed at making our defence unbreakable- for all the furious attacks of the Fascist troops will shatter upon these obstacles as sea waves are broken by granite rock." By September the Germans had reached the Central Railway Station, located in the industrial area of Stalingrad near the west bank of the Volga. Chuikov and the men of the 62nd Army supported by Rodimtsev's 13th Guard Division fought back and the commanders became an

¹⁴⁸ Rees, *War of the Century* P.156

inspiration to their men as they fought to hang onto the river bank, where Command Head Quarters was situated. Red Army soldiers who were on command there were completely fanatical and obsessed with their mission.¹⁴⁹ The German troops unprepared for hand-to-hand urban guerrilla warfare were always at a disadvantage as the Red Army was, at last, learning how to win.

The legend of Vasily Zaitsev the sniper is an integral part of the battle of Stalingrad. He was a young Siberian Red Army soldier from Batyuk, and was said to have started the 'sniper movement' in the besieged city but, although he was a skilled teacher, this is nonetheless propaganda as was Pavlov's House. In his book Michael Jones, exposes the fact that it was actually Alexander Kalentiev, a communications officer who only lasted two months in Stalingrad before he was killed on 17 November 1942, who inspired Zaitsev and others. 'Sniperism' emerged from this ordinary soldier's desire to do something extraordinary to defeat the enemy. His commander had allowed him to go 'hunting for Fritzes,' and he managed to kill ten in two days hiding in the ruins of the buildings of the city. This practice had a huge impact on the other men and caught on like wildfire, with hundreds of Red Army soldiers spontaneously volunteering. It gave the soldiers pride and purpose and an outlet for revenge.

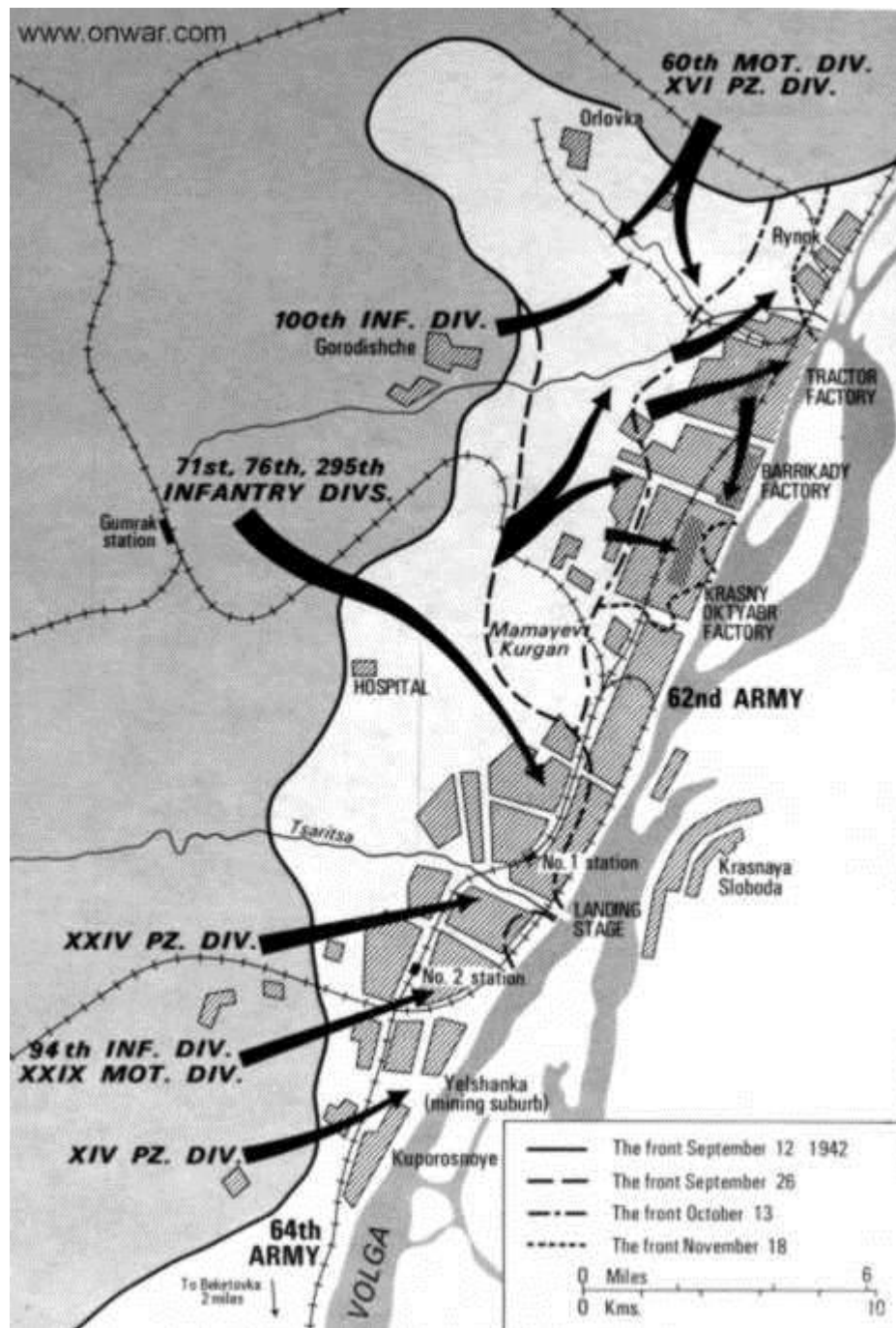
The duel between Zaitsev and a German sharp-shooter on the Mamaev Kurgan that was depicted in the movie *Enemy at the Gates*, only lasted a few hours not days,

¹⁴⁹ Rees, *War of the Century* P.156-159

and there is no record of a special shooter being brought in from Berlin.¹⁵⁰

Nonetheless, Zaitsev who was credited with over 200 kills was made a Hero of the Soviet Union and inspired many. Chuikov supported the sniper movement as he saw it as psychologically uplifting for his troops and demoralizing for the Germans, saying “It will make every German feel he is living under the barrel of a gun.” He believed in and trusted these men, and Zaitsev expressed the fact that the key to the troops hearts was that trust. These close bonds that developed between Red Army soldiers in the ruined city of Stalingrad as they struggled to survive were the essence

¹⁵⁰ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P p.176- 185; Rees, *War of the Century* P159-160; Craig, *Enemy at the Gates* (Old Saybrook: Konecky and Konecky, 1973) P.121-122



The Battle of Stalingrad

As German armed forces pressed forward into the city of Stalingrad during September, they encountered increasingly effective resistance from the defending Soviet troops. Within Stalingrad, various complexes became battlegrounds.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ "The Battle Of Stalingrad." <http://www.onwar.com/maps> Aug. 8. 2012

of a change that came over the Soviet army that enabled them to eventually rise up and become the victors in this horrific war.

A key strategic position in the city of Stalingrad was the Mamaev Kurgan, a great hill that dominated the city and gave a clear view of its surrounds and was called Height 102 on the Soviet Army's maps.¹⁵² From its heights could be seen the Stalingrad Tractor Factory, where the superb T-34 tanks were still being built and repaired, (and were often driven straight out to the battlefields beyond the city by the workers themselves), the Barrikady Gun Factory which became one of the last strong holds in the battle and the Red October (Krasnyi Oktiabr') steel plant. The hill was steeped in history, and was reputed to be an old Tartar burial ground.¹⁵³ Both sides fought fiercely for possession of this mound which gave both a tactical and a psychological advantage. The Red Army defenders of Stalingrad believed that if they lost it they would lose the battle, and it became a terrible contest of brutality and stubbornness to gain and hold the hill. "We decided we would hold onto the Mamaev Kurgan whatever happened," said Chuikov.¹⁵⁴ It changed hands many times during the battle, and was bombarded so much by the Luftwaffe, some places on the hill bore more metal than dirt.¹⁵⁵

From the middle of September throughout October the German infantry tried to push General Chuikov's 62nd Army out of the ruins of the city and into the Volga. Eventually the 62nd Army's hold was reduced to bridgeheads on the steep river

¹⁵² Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* P.387

¹⁵³ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P.48

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, P. 50

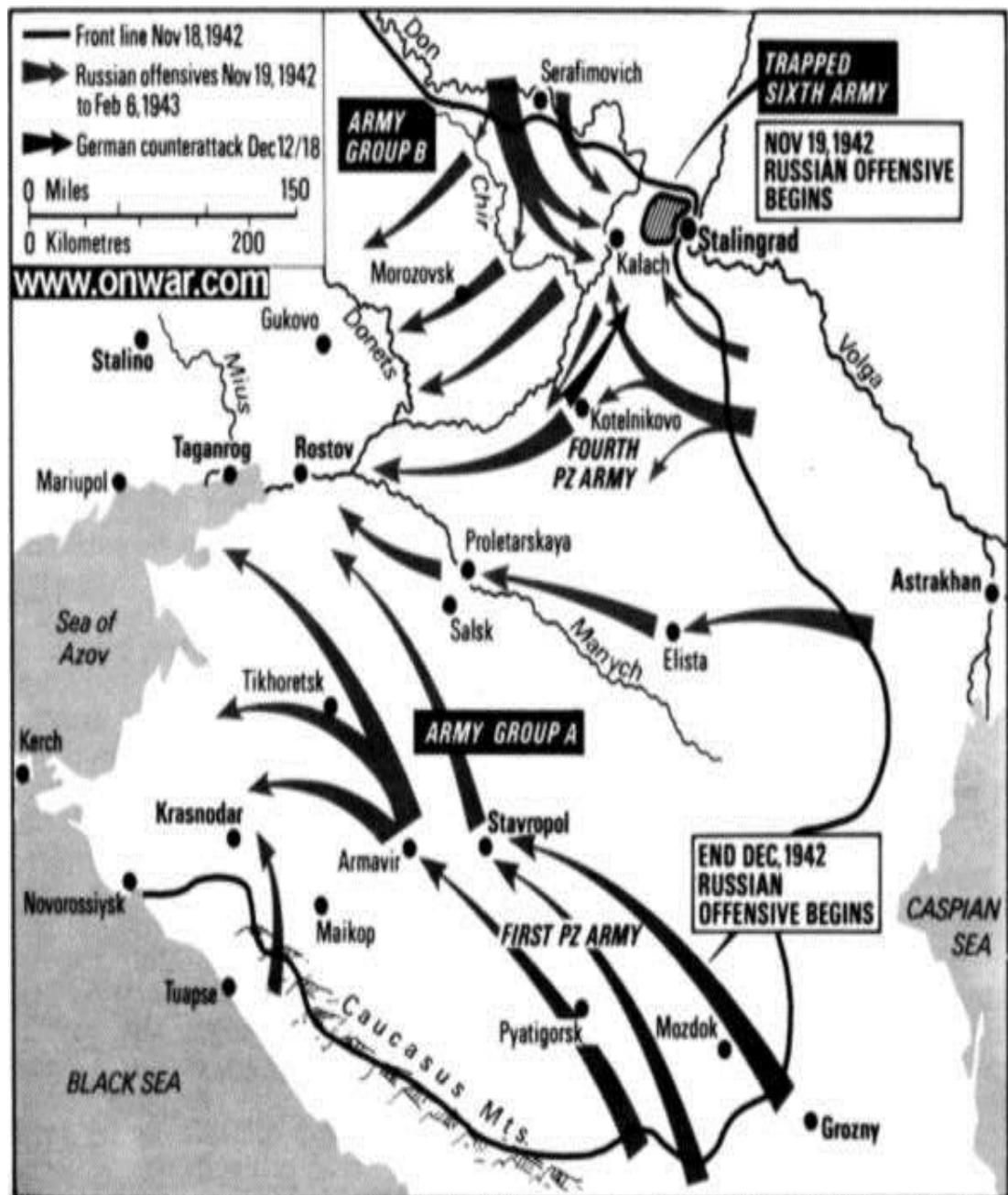
¹⁵⁵ Poroskov, *Russian Life*, Vol.45.6 (November-December 2002) P.37

bank. There the defenders dug in, supported by Soviet reinforcements and masses of artillery sited on the far shore. Although Chiukov's unit was the most famous involved in the battle of Stalingrad because it was inside the city, it was only one of four armies in General Yeremenko's Stalingrad Army Group. General Tolbukhin and his forces were positioned south of the city on the right bank of the Volga, and in the north was General Rokossovsky's Don Army Group. On 19 November, as the winter set in, the Soviet forces outside Stalingrad city began an encirclement of the German 6th Army and the 4th Panzer Army in Operation Uranus.¹⁵⁶

Operation Uranus became the Soviets major victory and was inspired by the German's own encirclement tactics mounted in 1941. Tukhevachsky's denounced 'Deep Operations' were at last brought back by Zhukov and Vasilevsky and with Stalin's approval, as he began to listen to his military tacticians. Strategic decision making was critical during the period of October 1942 through to November 1943. During this period Stavka overcame the lack of realism that was so characteristic of its earlier planning, and began planning a more stable course for its continuing campaigns. The main thrust was to be on the less superior forces of the Romanians, Hungarian, and Italian soldiers who were positioned on the flanks of the German armies.¹⁵⁷ Secret operations ensued, and the Soviets now showed a talent for military deception. They camouflaged tanks, and loaded them onto railway trucks headed for 'a secret destination,' not even known by the commander of the brigade who escorted them. On 24 October they were unloaded at Kamulka station, north of

¹⁵⁶ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War, 1941-1945* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005) P.160-161

¹⁵⁷ Rees, *War of the Century* P.168-170



Operation Uranus: November 19, 1942 - February 6, 1943

As the German 6th Army continued its battle of attrition to capture Stalingrad, the Soviet military command prepared to launch a counteroffensive (*Operation Uranus*) that aimed to encircle the German army fighting in Stalingrad and bring about the collapse of southern wing of the German front.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ "Operation Uranus: November 19, 1942- February 6, 1943" <http://www.onwar.com.au> Oct. 8, 2012

Stalingrad and were slowly driven in the dark supervised by Zhukov himself. “Then you could hear voices saying, Zhukov! Zhukov! , and I could recognise Zhukov with a group of Generals,” recalled Ivan Golokolenko, an officer in the 5th Tank Army who took part in Operation Uranus.

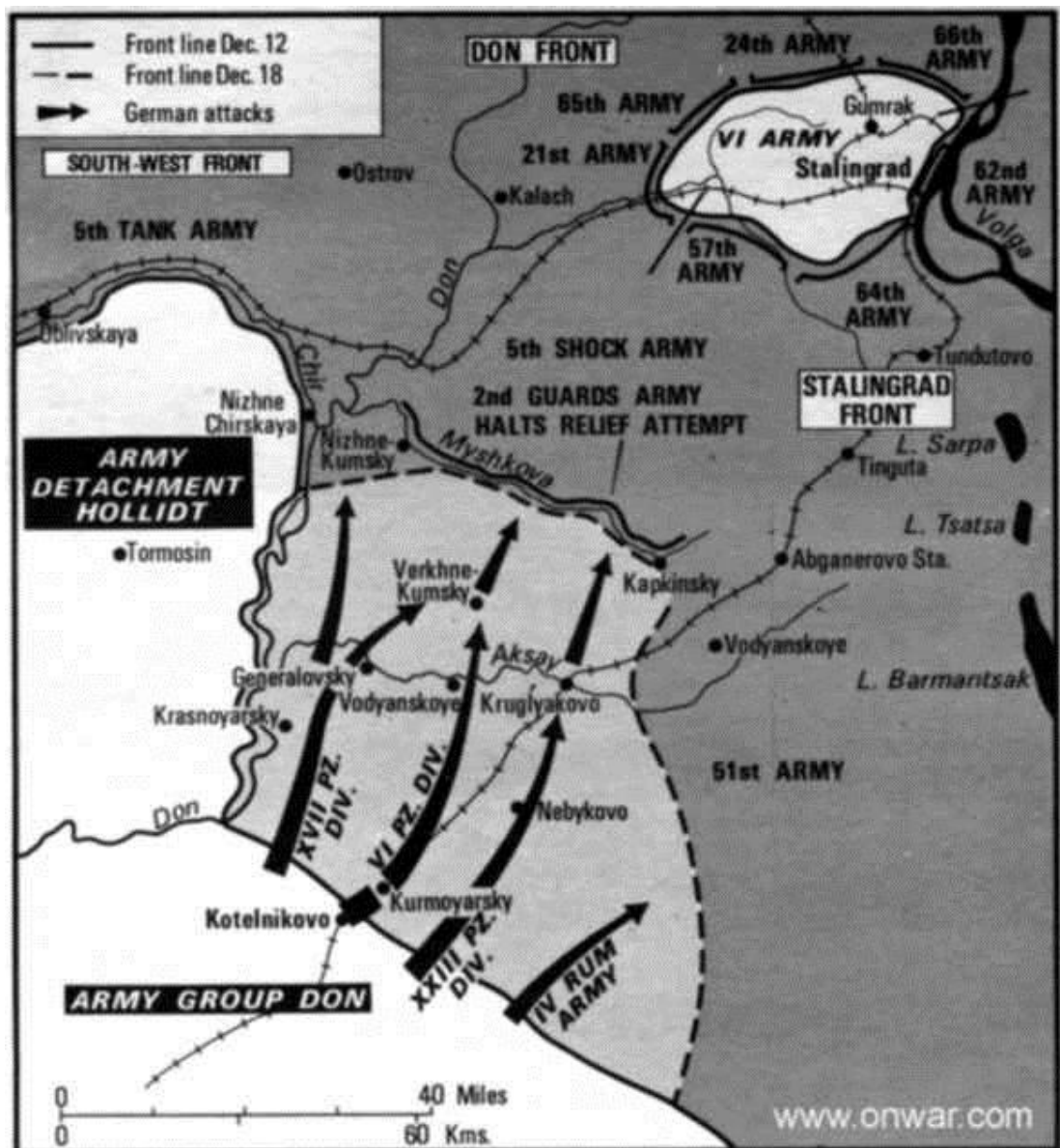
A third and secret army Group, the Southwestern, made up of the 21st, 63rd Armies, and the 5th Tank Army led by General Vatutin, had been deployed west of Rokossovsky’s forces on the upper Don. On 19 November Uranus began with an artillery barrage that concentrated all its firepower in one area, which was a new and ‘Germanic’ way, for Red Army tactics. The main thrust of Operation Uranus was west of the Don River, over 150 kilometres away from Paulus’ group. Cutting through Romanian positions, the Axis forces weak spot, and bypassing enemy strong points, Vatutin’s mobile forces wheeled around Stalingrad, only 160 kilometres west of the city.¹⁵⁹ The Romanians had not been well equipped by the Germans especially in anti-tank guns and 27,000 soldiers were taken prisoner on the first day of the Soviet operation.¹⁶⁰ Soviet strategy had improved in what the Soviets called the ‘Second Period of the war,’ from 19 November 1942- December 1943.¹⁶¹

By now it was snowing and the temperatures had dropped considerably making the Germans and their allies as miserable as they had been the previous winter. The Romanians were not as motivated as the Germans in this war, and had been treated very badly by their superior allies. Romanian soldiers and horses received less

¹⁵⁹ Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East* P.161

¹⁶⁰ Lee Baker, *The Second World War on the Eastern Front* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009) P.66

¹⁶¹ David M. Glantz, “Soviet Military Strategy during War (November 1942- December 1943): A Reappraisal.” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 60, No.1 (Jan., 1996) Pp. 117-118



Operation Winter Storm: Attempt to Relieve 6th Army Battle of Stalingrad: December 12-18, 1942

German armed forces of Army Group Don made an unsuccessful attempt break through and relieve the German 6th Army encircled in Stalingrad. Soviet military resistance proved too great to overcome with the German units available and the great 6th Army remained isolated.¹⁶²

¹⁶² "Operation Winter Storm: Attempt to Relieve 6th Army Battle of Stalingrad: December 12-18, 1942." <http://www.onwar.com> Oct 12, 2012

rations than the Germans. Also language barriers hindered the allied forces from making any true bonds, and the Romanians and Hungarians were not on good terms. These problems did not give Germany's allied forces much motivation or build morale in their ranks. Although they fought bravely they were unable to defend the German armies as well as they could have.¹⁶³

A southern pincher, from the left flank of Yeremenko's Stalingrad Army Group, attacked on 20 November. The two Soviet spearheads met near Kalach in the middle Don River on the 24th. Paulus' 6th Army was trapped with 330,000 men ¹⁶⁴in what the Germans termed, the Cauldron (*Der Kessel*).¹⁶⁵ The previous tactics of surprise and lightning attacks did not exist in the German armies any more. Paulus was a hesitant leader always looking for Hitler's guidance, but the Fuehrer had chosen the worst possible time to leave his headquarters in East Prussia, and was staying at the Berghof in southern Bavaria.¹⁶⁶ The Red Army had come a long way tactically, "We felt inspiration...we felt confidence that we were capable of beating the enemy successfully, and this operation remained the most memorable-the brightest-event. I remember I felt as if I had wings, I felt as if I was flying. Before that I used to feel depressed..." said Golokolenko. As the strategic tactics of the Soviets improved, and they learnt the art of deception, so did their morale increase.

After he found out what had happened Hitler told Paulus to stay put and make no attempt to break out of the Cauldron. Goring boasted that his Luftwaffe would

¹⁶³ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* Pp.249-250

¹⁶⁴ Ibid,161; Baker, *The Second World War on the Eastern Front* P.66

¹⁶⁵ Ibid,161

¹⁶⁶ Rees, *War of the Century* P.180

supply the 6th Army by an 'air bridge,' as they had done earlier at Demyansk in 1941.¹⁶⁷ General Field Marshal Eric von Manstein was ordered to attack from the south-west of the front to cut a relief corridor through the Soviet encirclement, and relieve Paulus' army. His Operation Winter Tempest began on 12 December and pushed on through the snow into the Soviet ring around Stalingrad giving the German troops hope. But the Soviets had placed 60 Divisions inside the encirclement and Manstein could not carry out his task having to withdraw in late December.

German Airlift could not drop the required amount of food and equipment to keep an army the size of the 6th going, and sometimes the wind blew supplies into Soviet territory. The trapped German army had no food, were covered in lice, and were freezing to death. In the words of Bernhard Bechler a German soldier, "We were just lying there, without food, almost frozen to death, it was dreadful...it was minus 20 or 30 degrees, we were lying in dugouts in the snow." The *Handbook of Military Psychology* states that humans who are subjected to 'environment stress' such as combat stress (CSR) that taxes or surpasses the person's resources and threatens their well-being can be affected in their task performance, have decreased attention, degraded problem solving and even lowered immunity to disease.¹⁶⁸ The German 6th Army could not function properly as human beings during this horrific time, let alone as an efficient fighting force. Men raved wildly in their bunks and some lay there howling.¹⁶⁹ At its worse point the situation culminated in the scenario where each German soldier had no more than 20 grams of food per day.¹⁷⁰ Abandoned in a

¹⁶⁷ Rees, *War of the Century* P.181

¹⁶⁸ Albery, William B. et al. Eds. Reuven Gal, and A. David Mangelsdorff. *Handbook of Military Psychology*. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991). Pp.184-5.

¹⁶⁹ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* P. 338

¹⁷⁰ Wieder, *Stalingrad: Memories and Reassessments* P.147

strange country, missing family, and slowly starving to death, all hope gone of victory, some officers in the 6th Army committed suicide over Christmas and New Year.¹⁷¹

On 23 November Paulus sent a message to Army Group B which was forwarded onto Hitler, “Murderous attacks on all fronts... Arrival of sufficient air supplies is not believed possible, even if weather should improve. The ammunition and fuel situation will render the troops defenceless in the very near future... Paulus.” Hitler denied Paulus any freedom of movement or decision, in a message headed ‘*Fuhrerbefehl*’, the highest priority Fuhrer Decree, and robbed the 6th Army of any chance to escape during the time the Soviets were trying to strengthen their hold around the pocket.¹⁷²

A Soviet assault that began on 25 November, codenamed Operation Mars, tried to drive back the remaining German forces that were left over from the battle of Moscow, in the area that was called ‘the Rzhev salient.’ Despite Lieutenant- General Ivan Konev’s best efforts this manoeuvre was a disaster for the Red Army, and that humiliating fact was a well guarded secret until 1999.¹⁷³ Operation Little Saturn on 16 December had better results, and the Red Army attacked the Germans near the Chir and Don Rivers, virtually destroying the Italian army.¹⁷⁴ As Paulus’ 6th Army slowly died of starvation and disease, on 24 January the last German airfield in the encirclement fell to the Red Army as the Soviets tightened the ring around the city of Stalingrad.

¹⁷¹ Rees, *War of the Century* P.182

¹⁷² Craig, *Enemy at the Gates: The Battle for Stalingrad* P.200

¹⁷³ Baker, *The Second World War on the Eastern Front* P.66

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, P.66

Hitler responded by making Paulus a Field-Marshal on 30 January, because no German field-marshal had ever been captured or had surrendered, and he expected him to commit suicide. Instead he emerged from his basement headquarters at the Stalingrad Department Store (Univermag), and did surrender on 31 January 1943, telling Gerhard Hindenlang, one of his battalion commanders, "I am a Christian... I refuse to commit suicide."¹⁷⁵ An entire Axis field army had been trapped, commanded by a field marshal and with five corps head quarters, 22 German divisions and many troops from the Axis allies. The disaster was unprecedented in the history of the German Army.¹⁷⁶

On February 1942 the remnants of the German forces in the city were surrounded and Chuikov supervised the bombardment himself. They surrendered at midday, and it marked the end to the battle of Stalingrad. Mereshko remarked that, "The sudden silence was overwhelming, and some of our soldiers, habituated to the constant din of fighting, couldn't stand it...men were shooting rifles, letting off grenades, just to relieve the tension."¹⁷⁷

The last pocket of resistance surrendered on 3 February, and 90,000 German troops went into captivity, many never returning home. Soviet operations continued to push the Germans back from their positions on the front and in February 1942 the Red Army recovered territory in the Don River Basin. By 14 February Kharkov had been set free of German rule, only to be recaptured by Mantein's counter-offensive. But the Red Army had 'learnt to fight,' and the German forces were suffering heavier

¹⁷⁵ Rees, *War of the Century* P.185

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, P.67; Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East* P.162

¹⁷⁷ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P.246

losses than they had ever anticipated.¹⁷⁸ The Red Army had shown courage and resilience during the battle of Stalingrad and continued on in that strain at the battle of Kursk, in July 1943, which was a mighty victory for the Soviets. They showed that they could defeat the Germans, and they eventually drove them all the way back to Berlin

¹⁷⁸ Baker, *The Second World War on the Eastern Front* Pp.68-69

Conclusion

The Red Army of the Soviet Union that had struggled from its very inception with hardships from every quarter, were eventually able to rise up and defeat an enemy far superior than itself in battle strategy and experienced soldiers. Despite the purges of the 1930s and the immense numbers of imprisoned and executed Red Army officers, a few excellent men arose who were able to lead their men to victory. Enforced battle, with the fear of being shot by their own government was a huge incentive at times to make a soldier fight, and they were not always as courageous as the Soviet Union propaganda machine made out. But despite huge losses and everything that the enemy and Stalin threw at them, the men and women of the Red Army somehow survived.

The Battle of Stalingrad lasted 200 days and ranged over 100,000 square kilometres. Over two million participants employed some 26,000 field guns and mortars, as well as 20,000 tanks and as many aircraft. German losses totalled 1.5 million (killed, wounded and taken prisoner), which was one quarter of its total Eastern Front forces. Over sixty divisions were destroyed at Stalingrad and a three day period of mourning was declared in Germany.

Despite many initial setbacks in 1941, the soldiers of the Red Army managed to emerge as the victors in Nazi Germany's siege of Stalingrad. The bonds that the soldiers of the Red Army formed at Stalingrad, in the most horrifying of circumstance, were the most important weapon that they had. It was this spirit of

comradeship that helped them to survive and gain the victory. General Chuikov's courage and steadfastness as he fought side by side his fellow soldiers was an inspiration to his troops. He shared his food with his troops, slept in the same trenches with them, and encouraged other commanders to do the same, until they all looked upon each other as equal. In return the troops wanted to fight as hard as they could and did not want to let their superiors down.¹⁷⁹ The legends of Stalingrad will always fascinate and intrigue us, but the real truth is the most shocking and awe inspiring story of World War Two. How the Red Army managed to survive in a city that was in ruins and hold out for so long still mystifies us.

Joseph Stalin, one of the most ruthless and stubborn tyrants in history, learnt at last to listen and heed the advice of others, such as the brilliant military tactician, Marshal Georgy Zhukov. The inclusion of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky's deep battle tactics, that had been missing for so long from the Red Army, and introducing deceptive strategy during the battle, ensured victory at last, for the besieged city and its long-suffering troops and citizens. Adolf Hitler made some terrible blunders during the war with the Soviets, which helped bring himself and his whole country to its knees. The environment of the Soviet Union also had its role to play in the battle against the Axis forces, as rain, mud, heat, freezing cold temperatures and snow, were at times the deciding factors of who would live and who would die.

¹⁷⁹ Jones, *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* P.192

General Vasily Chuikov is buried at the Mamaev Kurgan, as are many Red Army soldiers who fought on that sacred mound. The story of the 62nd Army and the 13th Guards Army *is* the story of Stalingrad; and they stopped the German army from reaching the Volga. If the German armies had captured the city it would have been a tremendous psychological blow to the Soviet Union, one from which it may not have recovered. The Red Army survived despite its difficult beginning in 1918, and the long years of lack of funds, good military training, and experienced officers, to gain the victory in the bloodiest battle in history, the battle of Stalingrad.

Appendices

Number One



Order No. I of the Petrograd Soviet, March 14, 1917

March 1 (14), 1917.

To the garrison of the Petrograd District. To all the soldiers of the Guard, army, artillery and fleet for immediate and precise execution, and to the workers of Petrograd for information.

The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies has decided:

1. In all companies, battalions, regiments, depots, batteries, squadrons and separate branches of military service of every kind and on warships immediately choose committees from the elected representatives of the soldiers and sailors of the above mentioned military units.

2. In all military units which have still not elected their representatives in the Soviet of Workers' Deputies elect one representative to a company, who should appear with written credentials in the building of the State Duma at ten o'clock on the morning of March 2.

3. In all its political demonstrations a military unit is subordinated to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and its committees.

4. The orders of the military commission of the State Duma are to be fulfilled only in those cases which do not contradict the orders and decisions of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

5. Arms of all kinds, as rifles, machine-guns, armoured automobiles and others must be at the disposition and under the control of the company and battalion committees and are not in any case to be given out to officers, even upon their command.

6. In the ranks and in fulfilling service duties soldiers must observe the strictest military discipline; but outside of service, in their political, civil and private life soldiers cannot be discriminated against as regards those rights which all citizens enjoy.

Standing at attention and compulsory saluting outside of service are especially abolished.

7. In the same way the addressing of officers with titles: Your Excellency, Your Honor, etc., is abolished and is replaced by the forms of address: Mr. General, Mr. Colonel, etc.

Rude treatment of soldiers of all ranks, and especially addressing them as "thou," is forbidden; and soldiers are bound to bring to the attention of the company committees any violation of this rule and any misunderstandings between officers and soldiers.

This order is to be read in all companies, battalions, regiments, marine units, batteries and other front and rear military units.

Trotsky's Order Number 65 (sic)

1. Every scoundrel who incites anyone to retreat, to desert or not to fulfil a military order, is to be shot.
2. Every soldier of the Red Army who voluntarily deserts his post is to be shot.
3. Every soldier who throws away his rifle or sells part of his uniform is to be shot.
4. Battle –police units are to be stationed along the entire front-line zone, in order to catch deserters. Any soldier who tries to offer resistance to these units is to be shot on the spot.
5. All local soviets and Committees of the Poor, are obligated, on their part, to take all measures to catch deserters. Deserter-hunts are to be carried out twice in every 24 hours, at 8 am. And 8pm. Captured deserters are to be handed over to the headquarters of the nearest unit or to the nearest military commissariat.
6. Persons guilty of harbouring deserters are liable to be shot.
7. Houses in which deserters are found are to be burnt down.

Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 487-8.

Commanders seldom enforced such draconian measures. Most often, when deserters were apprehended they were simply assigned to duty in a different unit.

Number Three

The original signatories were:

Big Four: United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, Republic of China

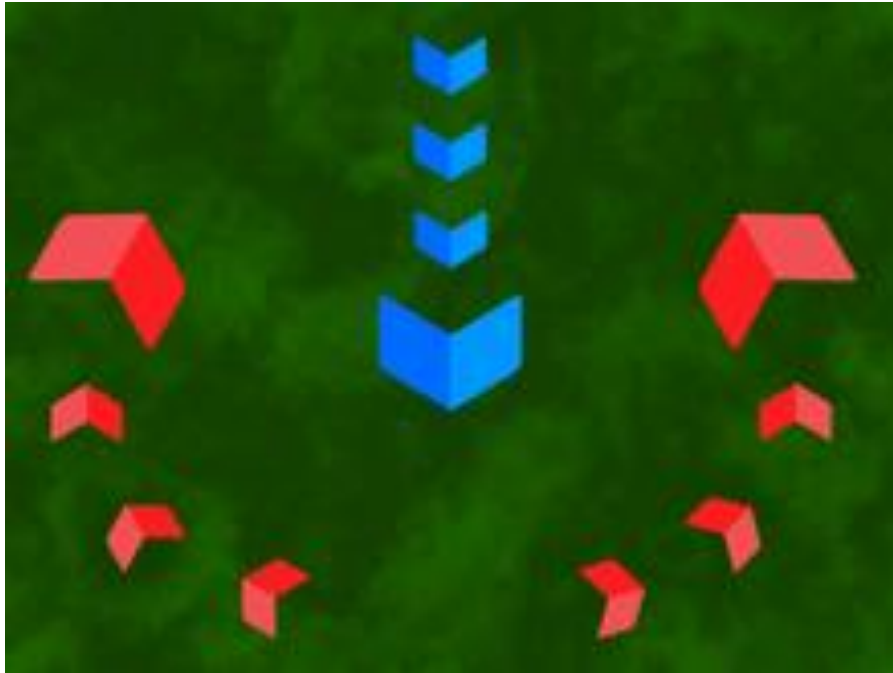
British Commonwealth: Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa.

Other Powers: Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala,

Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama.

In Exile: Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway,
Poland, Yugoslavia.

Number Four.



A Pincer strategic movement

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